THE HERO OF HERAT

MAUD DIVER

No 1.

THE HERO OF HERĀT

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

UNCONQUERED
THE HERO OF HERĀT
THE JUDGMENT OF THE SWORD
STRANGE ROADS
THE STRONG HOURS
LONELY FURROW
SIEGE PERILOUS
BUT YESTERDAY
A WILD BIRD

Published by JOHN MURRAY

CAPTAIN DESMOND, V.C.
THE GREAT AMULET
CANDLES IN THE WIND
DESMOND'S DAUGHTER
LILĀMANI
FAR TO SEEK
COOMBE ST. MARY'S

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THE HERO OF HERĀT

A FRONTIER BIOGRAPHY IN ROMANTIC FORM

BY MAUD DIVER

"India, fertile in heroes, has shown since the days of Clive no man of greater or earlier promise than Eldred Pottinger. Yet hero as he was, you might have sat for weeks beside him at table and never discovered that he had seen a shot fired."
—Sir Henry Lawrence, K.C.B.

"Things gained, are gone,
But great things done—endure."—Swinburne.

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TO

MY HUSBAND AND READY HELPER

I DEDICATE THIS BOOK

M. D.

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NOTE OF ACKNOWLEDGMENT

In giving an artistic form to the life study of an actual man, it seems only fair to myself and my readers to state clearly, at the outset, that my chosen form has not been used as a cloak for inaccuracy, or as a means of " improving " on life by a judicious seasoning of fact with fiction.

No pains have been spared to make this, in every sense, a true record of the man and of the stirring events in which he took part. Even in conversations clothed with words of my own, I have introduced very few—save among minor native characters—of which the gist is not given either in personal accounts or in Pottinger's long and detailed letters to Government from Herāt.

Above all, in touching on the many delicate and difficult points in that chapter of blunders and disasters, the first Afghan War, I have done my utmost to see clearly and present fairly a very complex subject. I have set down nothing that I have not verified more than once in the many personal and historical accounts I have studied during the last two years.

It only remains that I tender my grateful thanks and acknowledgments to all those who have in any way helped me to make this record of a brave man's career as complete and truthful as I could wish; more especially to the present Major Eldred Pottinger, R.A., and other members of his family for the use of letters, journals, and photographs; to Major Broadfoot, R.E., and Mrs. Colin

Mackenzie, whose first edition of Sir Vincent Eyre's journal, interleaved with her husband's notes, proved a mine of wealth; to the Record Office authorities in Calcutta and Bombay for copies of letters not to be found at home; and, above all, to the India Office authorities in London for countless books borrowed and for free access to the MS. Records, whence I drew all that is told of Herāt in Book III, from Pottinger's own letters to Government, and without which the story of his life would have been lamentably incomplete.

The authorities most frequently quoted are Sir John Kaye and Sir Henry Durand.

With regard to the problem of spelling Indian and Afghan names it seemed best, in most cases, to adopt the more modern fashion, and the following short guide to vowel sounds should obviate mispronunciation—

ā = *ar.*	in = *een.*
a = *u* in *but.*	ai = as *i* in *vine.*
i = *ee.*	ō = as in *note.*
ir = *eer.*	u = *oo.*

MAUD DIVER.

THE BIRCHES,
HASLEMERE,
September, 1911.

INTERPRETATION

"A HERO? I don't quite know what that is. But I imagine a hero is a man who does what he can. The others do not."

Thus Romain Rolland, in *Jean Christophe*: and a definition so entirely devoid of cheap glamour, seems a fitting introduction to a hero as modest as he was essentially heroic in the largest sense of that much-abused word.

But men died early in those tumultuous decades when the last half of our Indian Empire was in the making; and to Eldred Pottinger the end came before he had attained to the fullness of power that was in him. For a few years England and India resounded with his name. Again a few years and Death overtook him. By then India was on the eve of the first Sikh War, that brought to birth a fresh outcrop of heroes. '47 brought the second Sikh War; '49 the conquest of the Punjab; '57 the Great Revolt. Indian events moved swiftly in those days; and, with the onward sweep of history, the man who had written his name on one page of it was soon forgotten by all except students of that period.

"So little is now remembered of this self-denying, heroic officer," wrote Mrs. Colin Mackenzie in '79, and in the present century, how much less! Of what avail, then, to record the remarkable events of Eldred Pottinger's all too brief career in a "Life" of the usual pattern?

Considering this, I have chosen rather to make it the basis of a character study worked out through the chances and changes of that disastrous historical drama—the first Afghan War.

For closer acquaintance with the man reveals a character well worth considering in detail by a generation of English men and women who tend, more and more, to set expedience above principle, and to rate personal success—however ephemeral, however attained—as a man's sole claim to distinction.

In the lucrative qualities, admired of a commercial age, Eldred Pottinger was woefully lacking. He had neither moral adaptability nor personal push. He stumbled on his hour of glory almost in his own despite, and certainly failed to make capital of it from a worldly point of view. Fool or idealist—which you will. Yet, "England needs Pottingers, not place-seekers," though she only admits that need in the hour of national trouble; and appreciates them best at a distance, or wherever her trouble is acute. In times of peace, when men worship the golden calf called Business, she frankly prefers the man of talent to the man of great character. His ready pliability, his keen eye to the main chance, his tact in accepting, without seeming to perceive, his senior's commercial view of life, make him simpler and pleasanter to deal with; while England, confident in her long-suffering Star, justifies herself by the not unfounded reflection that *when* the crisis comes, there will be no lack of "uncomfortable, irritating heroes to pick her chestnuts out of the fire."

Of such was Eldred Pottinger; though in him the active heroism of the soldier was mellowed by the self-effacing heroism of the man. His brief and tragic spell of Afghan service, ending in misinterpretation and injustice, threw into strong relief the unquestioning religious

faith, the large nobility of soul, which he shared with Nicholson, Outram, the Lawrences—that gallant group of men who established British rule in the Punjab; established also an ideal of British character that remains unshaken to this day. Far from faultless, and differing widely, with the individual differences of strong natures, they were alike in one essential quality—they feared God; but they feared nothing else in heaven or earth.

Of Pottinger the same can be said: yet his letters and journals are singularly free from the didactic, self-conscious religiosity of the true Early Victorian. The simple, selfless spontaneity of his good impulses links him rather with the earlier pioneer saints of Christendom: the type etched by Coventry Patmore in a passage so singularly apt that it is worth quoting—

> "The 'Saint' has no fads. You may live in the same house with him and never find out that he is not a sinner like yourself; unless you rely on negative proofs, or obtrude lax ideas on him, and so provoke him to silence. . . . On the whole he will give you an agreeable impression of general inferiority to yourself. You must not, however, presume on this inferiority so far as to offer him an affront: for he will be sure to answer you with some quiet, unexpected remark, showing a presence of mind—arising, I suppose, from the presence of God—which will make you feel you have struck a rock and only shaken your own shoulder. If you compel him to speak about religion he will probably surprise and scandalise you by the childishness of his thoughts. The Saint" (in fact) "does everything that any other decent person does; only somewhat better and with a totally different motive."

There you have the man : doubtless damned already in the eyes of a livelier generation, in whom fear of the Lord has given place to fear of being bored : to a conviction that virtue itself is negative—therefore dull ; and vice positive—therefore interesting. Never was a statement more fundamentally false. The very derivation of the word virtue reveals it as something positive, expressing itself in action, not in mere refraining ; and when one has ventured to label a man " Saint," there is need to insist on this vital quality of action ; to repeat that " virtue is strong where character is strong ; and strong character has its perilous imperfections."

So Eldred Pottinger, for all his self-effacement and power of endurance, was essentially masculine, positive, hot-blooded : a force to be reckoned with, whatever his environment. His courage, moral and physical, was equal to any occasion. Even to avoid friction with his seniors, he would come to no compromise with the world and its shifty standards of conduct. In consequence, like Nicholson, he was seldom popular with those same seniors ; and Anglo-Indian society found him a dull fellow.

Sir John Kaye tells how Calcutta failed to lionise him, when he appeared there as the hero of Herāt—

> " The impression he made upon society in general was not favourable. He was shy and reserved and unwilling to speak of himself. He did not realise, in his person, his conversation or his manner, their idea of a youthful hero, and therefore thoughtless people were disappointed. But to the more thoughtful few he appeared precisely the man from whom such good deeds, as had made him famous, were to be expected. Heroism takes many shapes. In

> Eldred Pottinger it took the shape of a sturdy, indomitable perseverance—a courage, great in resistance to overwhelming odds; but there was nothing showy or impetuous about it. In all these respects the personal aspect and demeanour of the man represented his inward qualities."

And the task of revealing those inward qualities has not been made easier by the man's natural reserve and incapacity for self-expression; nor by the fact that many of his most important letters and journals have been irrevocably lost; most important of all, the detailed journal from May, 1837 to September, 1839, which contained the sole existing account of the Herāt siege from within the walls. All that now remains of the original are extracts given in Sir John Kaye's history of the first Afghan War. The probability is that the MS. was burnt with many other precious documents in a disastrous fire that broke out in Kaye's rooms.

Whether or no Eldred Pottinger left a lasting mark on the stormy history of his time is, after all, a matter of little moment. The unfinished column may yet bear the stamp of perfection. And if, as I hope to prove, his acquaintance is worth making, simply by reason of what he was, the interest of his personal story is heightened by the fact that he was fated to play a leading part in one of the darkest political dramas of our Anglo-Indian experience: a drama springing from an initial act of injustice and moving on with the inevitability of Greek tragedy to its terrible end.

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SKETCH-MAP OF AFGHANISTAN AND NORTHERN INDIA

BOOK I

EXPLORER

Hail and farewell! I must arise,
  Leave here the fatted cattle;
And paint on foreign lands and skies
  My Odyssey of battle.

The untented Kosmos my abode—
  I pass,—a wilful stranger;
My Mistress still the open road
  And the bright eyes of Danger.

Come ill or well, the cross, the crown,
  The rainbow or the thunder—
I fling my soul and body down,
  For God to plough them under.

R. L. S.

1

"Behold, Sahib—nestling, like a bride in the rough embrace of the hills—Kābul, City of Orchards!"

The speaker, a benevolent-looking Syud [1] from Pishin, drew rein in speaking, and pride vibrated in his tone, as he turned to gauge the impression made on his companion, who had rather the aspect of a fair-skinned Afghan merchant than of a Sahib. Only the Irish blue eyes betrayed him and the deep-toned voice when he made answer: "Truly a jewel among valleys, Syud-jee: a jewel that gleams the fairer for its rugged setting."

The Afghan smiled, well content; and there fell a long silence, while Eldred Pottinger looked across the valley, his adventurous spirit stirred, not so much by beauty seen, as by the magnetism of the Other Side.

At last, after seventy-five days of hardship and hazard, he had achieved the first stage of his journey toward the unseen goal of his dreams: and for the moment it was enough to feast eyes and mind on the Kābul valleys wedged between mountains loftier and more rugged than any he had yet seen. For now the northward view culminated in towering snow-peaks of the Hindu Kush; peaks with which he was to become tragically familiar within the next two years. He was destined also to see the City of Orchards under aspects many and terrible: but never, surely, did he forget that first vision of her,

[1] Holy man.

veiled, like some purdah princess, beneath a *sári* wrought from all the blossoms of all the fruit trees in the world. But beneath her silver *sári* this princess was a libertine at heart; even as her women behind their latticed *boorkhas* were past mistresses in the art of intrigue; and her men, beneath their hospitality, courage and rough good-humour, were unequalled in cunning, cruelty and revenge.

Yet, in this season of renewal, no city on earth could look fairer than Kābul. For beyond the orchards lay the cornfields; and beyond the fields on every ledge and terrace, vineyards, vineyards and again vineyards, set in long furrows that ensured the young plants much of sun and little of wind. Even up the snow-crowned slopes of the Pughman hills, that merge into the Hindu Kush, furrow climbed beyond furrow, till it was hard to see where cultivation ended and wild began.

And there were gardens aflame with colour: the King's garden on the north side of the city; and on the west, terraces climbing to Báber's tomb; the marble gleaming undimmed in its setting of evergreens and giant planes. Below, on the plain, a great lake mirrored the scene; and Kābul river, swollen with melting snows, went swirling through an avenue of mulberry trees, their young leaves clear as amber in the sun.

Only the hills overhanging the city seemed to stand savagely aloof, castellated masses of rock, their lower spurs crowned by a grey citadel fortress, the Bala Hissar of all big Afghan towns. In Kābul it served for palace and prison and fort. Set very high and doubly fortified, it was the one point of strength in a capital singularly defenceless, though the near hills bristled with ineffectual walls, intended to discourage marauding chiefs.

Eldred Pottinger's gaze, following his thoughts, lingered

on those same overhanging hills. Through them ran the direct route to Herāt, that he must be the first of his race to tread. At the prospect, he turned eagerly on the good friend who had led him safely through the wild districts between Kābul and Pishin.

"How long must I tarry in your City, before I can push on across the Hazara highlands?" [1]

Syud Mohun Shah looked doubtful. "Your Honour's heart is set on reaching Herāt through that unfriendly country, wherein no Feringhi [2] hath ventured yet?"

Yes, his Honour's heart was set upon the daring project: and the Syud beamed genially, in spite of risks ahead.

"Then must the Sahib study to achieve a disguise more complete than any assumed hitherto. In this land, if a stranger would travel unmolested, he must be either a holy man or a Sahib."

"And in the Hazara country, where Sahibs come not, he is condemned to holiness!" Pottinger inferred, smiling. "A difficult art to acquire."

"For holiness of the heart your Honour standeth already in high repute. Only to gain knowledge of outward forms, there is need for closer study of Afghan custom and doctrine. For this I would commend my friends, Syud Ahmed and Syud Hussain, honest men and good Sunnis. It hath been told me that they have business in Herāt this summer. If they will adventure in the Hazara region, and if your Honour will agree to join them, in the guise of a Sunni Mahomedan, all may go well."

"Agree? It is for your friends to agree, Syud-jee. If they will accept the risk of escorting a stranger, unpractised and clumsy at concealment, I can only prove my

[1] See Map at the end. [2] Foreigner.

gratitude by making that risk as slight as may be. For yourself, my friend, I know not how to requite your unfailing care and service."

"Nay, Sahib, that is a trifling matter," the Syud protested, genuinely moved. "It is reward sufficient if I be counted a true friend of the English and find favour in the eyes of their Government. On reaching Kābul, I go at once to the good Nawab Jubbur Khan. If there be one corner of Afghanistan where men of your race be welcome, it is at the Court of Dōst Mahomed Khan, *Amir-i-Kabir*." [1]

"So I have heard. Let us go forward then. But remember, no word of my further journey, save to those I shall join."

"Fear not, Sahib. In all other company I am dumb as a week-old corpse! Let us go on."

They went on accordingly: a shabby cavalcade of hill ponies and baggage mules, obviously the worse for travel. And Eldred Pottinger, riding on ahead, forgot the weariness in his limbs because of the high hope in his heart.

Two months earlier he had left, without a pang, such society and civilisation as obtained on the Sindh frontier in the first year of Victoria's reign; had set out for Afghanistan by the little-known Baluchistan route, which, in those restless days of expansion, was reckoned the road to fame.

Of the last Eldred Pottinger dreamed not at all. It was the true explorer's zest for the unknown that pricked him forward on a year-long journey of hardship, hazard and banishment from his kind.

His first step northward had been achieved by an exchange from the Bombay Artillery into the Kutch Irregular Horse. Here cavalry experience had been

[1] The great Amir.

added to gunnery practice; and he had gone through the mill of frontier outpost duty. Here, too, he had come into close contact with his uncle, Colonel Henry Pottinger, then Resident in Kutch: a political of high character, already marked for distinction. He knew and approved young Eldred's spirit of enterprise. His own had lured him in a like direction thirteen years before. But much work still remained to be done, work for which this hot-headed, lion-hearted nephew of his seemed very well equipped.

So it happened that, in the foregoing summer, Eldred had proffered his services for exploring and surveying the countries west of the Indus, in a formal application endorsed by a sincere tribute from his Commandant. "If my estimate of his character, after long acquaintance, be not incorrect," wrote Captain Ward, "I should say he is peculiarly fitted for the employment he covets by a natural and ardent desire for travelling, combined with much patience and temper in the endurance of privations." And a man had need of patience in those leisurely days when a letter posted in July did not receive Government sanction till October, and when the addition of a few necessary instruments involved another three months' delay. But there had been much to do and think of: Pushtu and Persian to be studied; routes to be discussed and mapped out with the uncle, whose own book, published ten years earlier, had fired his zeal to go and do likewise.

And here was the dream translated into reality; the subaltern into an explorer, secretly armed with books and instruments for so much of military surveying as could be achieved without risk of detection. There, at his feet, lay Kābul in her spring *sári*. Four or five weeks

should see him at Herāt; and once there—all Asia lay before him.

From boyhood, he had felt himself brother in spirit to the restless army of pioneers, the makers of Greater Britain: and now, after ten years of zealous, uneventful service, Fate had given him his chance.

What he would make of it remained to be seen. If there was nothing heroic in his aspect, there was much of promise. The blue eyes and warm brown of the beard—darkened with colour juice—belonged to a soldierly temper. Even at six-and-twenty the spirit that could so dare and so endure brooded in the grave eyes, showed in the resolute under lip; in the brow's commanding nobility and breadth, half hidden though it was beneath the folds of his turban. Judged superficially, he was only a sturdy-looking subaltern, too shy and reserved for carpet uses; far less at home between four walls than in camp or jungle—a man one would more readily appeal to at a crisis than invite to dinner. And certainly the first would have been more to his taste. In the past two months he had neither sat at a dinner table, nor used a fork, nor spoken with one of his own race. But he was not the man to quarrel with these trifling drawbacks. They were in the bond.

Following the river, he and his party entered Kābul through the south gate, a mere narrowing of rocks to a defile, whereby the river enters also and flows through the length of the city, which still lay some way ahead. Another mile of gardens brought them to the *Char Chutta*, at that time a remarkable remnant of Ali Merdan Khan's grand bazaar. The four covered streets, each one hundred and fifty feet long, were built of unburnt brick and roughly frescoed, their carved shop-fronts stacked with embroidery and jewellery, guns and chain

armour, rugs and furs; earthen jars for water drinkers, and for tea-drinkers great pots of iron, in which the Afghan stews it with salt and ghee. The space between was thronged with men from all parts of Asia, with horses, dogs, camels and strayed fowls. For Afghans, like the French, have their own cheerful, casual life of the street. Iced drinks were tossed off, *kabobs* prepared and eaten, there in the midst of the noisy stream of life that flows through every great bazaar in Asia.

It had been settled that Pottinger should wait at the *serái*, while the Syud went on to see the Amir and arrange for a suitable lodging. He was not gone long; and in his absence the others amused themselves bargaining and drinking *faloda*—a delicious wheat jelly mixed with sherbet and snow. Presently he brought word that any British officer would be welcome in the house of Nawab Jubbar Khan, brother of the Amir. One traveller was there already: reputed French. So thither they went; down a mean lane, through a great gate into a courtyard enclosed by a primitive two-storied building. Not a pane of glass or a fireplace had ever been seen in Kābul; but such comforts as the house afforded were very much at Pottinger's service, and welcome enough after the rough and tumble of the road.

In the rooms that were to be his he was greeted by the "French officer," who turned out to be Harlan, the clever, unscrupulous American adventurer, formerly physician to the Lion of Lahore; now in the employ of Dōst Mahomed Khan. To Pottinger's surprise, he wore English clothes, and gave him an English dinner, such as he had not eaten since leaving Kutch. Better than all were the cigars that followed and the joy of speaking in his own tongue. Harlan was a ready talker: and the tale of his adventures lost nothing in the telling.

To Pottinger, it was all sufficiently new and amusing; and when it was over he slept in luxury upon a string *charpoy* for the first time in seventy-six days.

And Kābul's ruler slept also untroubled by foreknowledge that the days were at hand when the greater nation to which he confidently looked for help would, in terrible fashion, accept his figurative invitation to consider himself and his country as its own. Yet were the hidden makers of drama already at work; and with the entrance of Eldred Pottinger into Kābul, the first actor had appeared upon the scene.

2

For three months Eldred Pottinger stayed in the house of Nawab Jubbar Khan, an Afghan of greater foresight, depth and moderation than any of the Barakzai brothers —not excepting the Amir.

Owing to a break in Pottinger's journal the reasons for this long delay are not quite clear. No doubt May was too early for crossing the Hazara highlands; and there was need for closer study of the language, life and customs of the Afghans, to say nothing of the religion he must now assume. Though delay was irksome, it gave him leisure to make friends with his new comrades, and write detailed letters to the uncle whose devotion he returned with interest; to younger brothers in Bombay and Bengal; to Mount Pottinger, County Down, the happy-go-lucky Irish home whence he had set out ten years earlier to conquer the world! The despatching of these was a costly and uncertain business; the *Kasid* [1] demanding his six or eight rupees in advance, and the letters' ultimate

[1] Runners.

fate hanging upon the Oriental's misty sense of time and responsibility. But, risk or no, letters must be despatched on the bare chance that some day they would arrive somewhere.

Himself an only child, left motherless at two years old, his father's second wife had taken him into her heart as one of her own. The step-relation at Mount Pottinger had nothing about it that was not beautiful. No distinctions were recognised there. Indeed, Mrs. Pottinger appears to have loved none among her own eight children more tenderly than the high-spirited, self-forgetful boy who, from first to last, was as true a son to her as mother ever had.

Glimpses of those early days, though few and meagre, aptly foreshadow the man. Mrs. Pottinger found the four-year-old Eldred a source of comfort, never to be forgotten, during her husband's long absences in his yacht; an extravagance that, like many others, had to be forgone when children multiplied and ill-advised speculations failed one after the other, till the impoverished landowner was driven to leave Mount Pottinger for a house more in keeping with his straitened means. These, by now, consisted mainly of the rentals from a certain Kilmore estate, left to him by his first wife in trust for her son; and, from all accounts, as woefully ill-managed as the rest of his affairs.

Family letters and comments leave an impression that Eldred Pottinger owed little either to the influence of a father, as lively and talented as he was extravagant and irresponsible. It seems probable the spirit of Eldred's unknown mother lived again in her son; seeing that his self-denial, tenderness and forbearance appears to have dated from nursery days. Even then it was found that he could keep a secret better than most grown

people; and if the interests of others were involved, wild horses would not draw it from him.

Very early, too, it was evident that, with all the boy's aptitude for book knowledge, the desire of his heart was towards foreign travel and military adventure. At Addiscombe, it was the courage, uprightness and manly bearing of the fourteen-year-old cadet that gained the admiration of his fellows. Only his quick and passionate temper gave him any lasting trouble. Family tradition has it that while at Addiscombe he invented some new form of shell and daringly exploded it, to the dismay of the authorities and the peril of those who shared the fun. Invention or mere mischief, the significance of the incident lies in the fact that, although others were implicated, Gentleman-Cadet Pottinger took on himself all responsibility for the breach of college rules, and tried to bear all the punishment. It nearly cost him his commission; yet nothing would induce him to reveal the names of his friends.

And so, on to India as a subaltern of artillery—an arm of the service that, for a hundred years, kept the name of Pottinger on its rolls. Three brothers and a sister had followed him to India; and he himself—his tramp royal ended—looked forward keenly to the deliberate homeward voyage, to glad reunion with the mother he had parted from as a boy of sixteen. But that lay two years ahead, at the most hopeful computation.

His own serious nature and much talk with his uncle had given him a wider understanding of matters political than the soldier of six-and-twenty is apt to possess. He knew that Colonel Pottinger—least fanciful of men—anticipated frontier complications at no distant date; that his keen penetration detected the hidden element of danger in Lord Auckland's scheme for opening the river

Indus to British enterprise and encouraging our commerce with Afghanistan. It is a truism of imperial history that commerce spells politics, and politics war; though in this case the friendly passages between Viceroy and Amir were genuine enough.

Dōst Mahomed Khan, Barakzai, had greeted the new Governor after the fashion of his kind: "The field of my hopes, which had before been chilled by the cold blast of wintry times, has, by the happy tidings of your lordship's arrival, become the envy of the Garden of Paradise. . . . Communicate to me whatever may suggest itself to your wisdom for the settlement of the affairs of this country, that it may serve as a rule for my guidance. . . . I hope your lordship will consider me and my country as your own."

Lord Auckland had sent answer, also after his kind, assuring the Amir of his wish to see the Afghans "a flourishing and united nation." But of personal advice no word, beyond the mild protest: "My friend, you are aware that it is not the practice of the British Government to interfere with the affairs of other independent States." Words writ in all good faith; for war with Afghanistan was the last thing the new Governor dreamed of or desired. Timid, cautious and well-meaning, his five years of office seemed to him a sublime opportunity for dispensing justice and happiness to the people under his charge. But the curse of the unstable was upon him; and, in India, the whole political atmosphere was a-flutter with portents not lightly to be disregarded. Of these the most disturbing came from the far north-west. Sir John McNeill, British minister in Teheran, wrote anxiously of a threatened Russo-Persian advance on Herāt—"the Gate of India." In which event, said scaremongers, the city must fall, and the whole fertile valley be-

come a base for further advance on Afghanistan and India.

Russian gold and Russian officers in Persia's army were facts not to be blinked : but the whole affair seemed very misty, very remote. Calcutta considered it officially, with a detached interest ; while in England McNeill's rousing pamphlet on Russia's progress in the East waked a livelier interest. The shadow of Napoleon's eagles gave place to the shadow of the Bear. The " Russian bogy " was born. Then, as now, there were many minds upon the matter ; but on two points all were agreed : the need for a fuller knowledge of Central Asian geography and a closer alliance with Afghanistan. It was in these days that Lord Auckland launched that peaceful " commercial mission " to Kābul—the prologue of a drama that should teach him terrible things. It was in these days also—the summer of '36—that Eldred Pottinger's cherished plan had taken definite shape. But with the ill-starred Kābul mission he had no concern —as yet.

The Governor-General's choice of an agent was one Captain Alexander Burnes, Political Assistant at Kutch, already a traveller of note and a personal friend of the Amir. A man of brains, resource and restless ambition, he was of those in whom desire outstrips discretion, and prejudice judgment—conditions fatal to political work of the first order. But the mission was commercial —in name at least ; and Burnes was an authority on trans-Indus countries. He had published a book, something of an event in those days. He had been flattered by London hostesses, and even bidden to Windsor ; heady diet for a young man of volatile temper, with a fine natural conceit of himself and a breezy disregard for ideas other than his own. To Colonel Pottinger—a

political officer of skill and judgment—his brilliant assistant had proved a thorn in the flesh. But for the older man's astonishing forbearance the other's official liberties might have recoiled on his own head. As it was, the Government orders of November, 1836, can hardly have been more welcome to Burnes than to his long-suffering chief. Before the month was out, the former had started for Kābul *via* Sindh. And in February '37 Eldred Pottinger set out for the same destination *via* Baluchistan.

At the moment there appeared small kinship between the two events; nor did either expedition seem charged with historic significance. Yet that double journey northward was as the tuning up of instruments in a theatre that had all Afghanistan for stage: and for the two men also, in that spring of 1837, the hour of destiny had struck, though they "heard not the bell——"

3

Throughout the weeks that followed his departure from Kutch, Eldred Pottinger experienced all the delights and drawbacks of pioneer travel dear to the heart of five-and-twenty. Mounted on a camel, roughly disguised as a Brahui from the Baluch border country, he rode hopefully forth upon that February morning; his companions, three non-commissioned native officers, all, like himself, on special leave. They travelled without tents, trusting to clear skies or wayside shrines for the night's rest. Their road lay across the salt deserts of Sindh and the Baluch passes; on through Quetta to Kandahar and Kābul; and thence on again, into the heart of untravelled Asia.

At the outset Pottinger's disguise was of the thinnest. He had not even darkened his skin or dyed his beard. But soon there was need of precaution more stringent; for a white face was still dreaded by the men of Sindh, mindful of warnings spoken by a Hindu merchant in the days when John Company rose to power.

"This tribe," said he, "never begin as friends without ending as enemies and seizing the country which they entered with the most amicable professions." The shrewd one passed away, but men remembered his words; and when Burnes explored the Indus in 1830, a holy man flung up his hands in dismay, crying: "Sindh is now gone! The English have seen the river, that is the road to its conquest."

Gone indeed! Already Sikh and British rulers coveted command of that king among rivers. For after Burnes came Eldred Pottinger, who, at the little frontier town of Wanga, narrowly escaped detection. In spite of precautions the venturesome four found themselves challenged for passports they had never troubled to procure. Their guns were seized, their saddle-bags examined, and only by skilful distribution of Pottinger's tell-tale belongings about their own persons did they succeed in disarming suspicion and recovering the guns. Better still, on the plea of foraging for their camels they won leave to sleep without the gates.

And early, very early, before the day-star had faded, Pottinger had arisen and shaken his comrades wide-awake. In the chill grey light, saddle-bags were packed, camels hurriedly loaded; and by the time the sun looked over the rim of the desert, Wanga lay miles behind them.

By the first big patch of jungle they turned aside to smoke and re-load at leisure. Abdullah and Edul Khan dismounted first. The latter had caught the nose-rein of

Pottinger's mount and was adjuring the Son of Kings to kneel, when a snarl, such as only a camel could perpetrate, was followed by a yell of anguish from Abdullah, whose beast had him by the shoulder and was shaking him as a dog shakes a rat.

In a flash all was confusion and a great shouting. Edul Khan flew to the rescue, brandishing his hookah bottom, which he broke over the brute's head. Pottinger's camel sprang up. Allah Dad Khan—whose breast was on its fore-knees—rolled bodily off, and, with the end of his matchlock, tilted at the enemy's eye. Pottinger, freed from his cloak, had leapt from the saddle, when Abdullah—inspired by terror—turned and fixed his teeth in the flesh of his tormentor's nose.

With a sound between a snarl and a groan the enemy released his hold; and, thanks to a thick cloak and *poshteen*,[1] the Afghan's skin was not broken.

"By Allah's will and the power of mine own jaw," said he, "I have left a finer mark on that devil's spawn than he hath left on me."

"*Wah-illah*—a bold man of his teeth!" Edul Khan applauded, with satiric gusto. "But who payeth for my new hookah bottom?"

He brandished the corpse under the muzzled one's contemptuous nose; and the incident ended in a shout of laughter.

But real friendliness with companions so ignorant, fanatical and ill-tempered was no easy matter for an Englishman of good breeding. Their moral obtuseness and unclean habits repelled him; and their incredible stupidity put a severe strain upon a temper he had hoped to tame by the hard living and lean fare of the jungle. Then there were those minor miseries that tyrannise by

[1] Sheep-skin coat.

sheer recurrence—greasy, ill-cooked meals and brick-dust tea; the hookah in place of pipe and cheroots. For Pottinger was no fancy-dress explorer. As his comrades fared, so he must fare—or go without; and in the first few weeks he more often went without. Only with the hookah he persevered. Life without tobacco in some form seemed impossible; and he had known many an old Company's officer who preferred his hookah to his pipe after mess. He made a fair fight for it. But the hookah triumphed; leaving him to the dismal prospect of days unsolaced and evenings unblest.

Meantime his fair skin, book learning and unobtrusive asceticism soon earned him a reputation for saintliness; and his companions, keenly alive to the value of holiness, congratulated themselves on the peculiarities of the Sahib. He himself guessed nothing till the guide they had engaged prostrated himself before the supposed Syud and saluted his foot, covering Pottinger with confusion and causing the Afghans to smile in their beards.

This was on the 4th of March; and before them lay the Indus, raging under the lash of a gale from the north. Here they found a crowd of fellow-wanderers patiently awaiting their chance to cross; whole families migrating or returning, their worldly goods rolled in cotton quilts or knotted in blue bundles; herdsmen shepherding distraught cattle; merchants with their bales; and in the midst one lonely, purposeful British officer, his will driving him toward one goal, his destiny toward another.

Four barges heaved and fell, straining at their ropes, while Pottinger and his comrades manœuvred their rebellious camels on board. The crossing was dangerous work and bitter cold. The gale soon brought rain; and finally they grounded two hundred yards from the

shore, to which they must wade through knee-deep mud and water.

Wet, cold and hungry as they were, camels must be loaded and a night's lodging found. The dusk ahead showed no friendly glimmer, and the guide—having secured two rupees in advance—disclaimed all knowledge of the road with the engaging modesty of his kind. So they went forward at random behind a party who had crossed with them, the modest hireling for form's sake leading the way.

Before long all were at a standstill. Women fell to whimpering, men to swearing; and Allah Dad Khan, past-master of Asiatic invective, consigned the hireling to *Jehannum*, where his noseless mother and sisters were doubtless causing blood feuds among the sons of perdition. The guide, sure of his rupees, retaliated in kind; and Pottinger saw that unless he intervened, they might keep it up till dawn. The plight of the women and children afflicted him; and conquering his reluctance, he silenced the combatants by announcing that, if no one knew the way, he, a stranger, would do what he could; let those follow who chose. At that, the wettest and weariest took heart of grace, little dreaming that the stranger of the deep voice and reputed holiness was but a Feringhi subaltern exercising his racial instinct for leadership and resource.

In time they reached a canal declared unsafe for crossing except by special fords. There were lights opposite, and the sound of men's voices; so they shouted to those favoured ones for help. But the favoured ones, being dry and warm, cared nothing for their plight; and the guide, for very shame, floundered into unknown depths, praying that Allah might direct his steps.

But at the third step forward he dropped shrieking

into a hole. There was a shout of dismay ; and Pottinger hauled him, spluttering, to the surface.

"I will find the ford for myself," said he. "Let the rest come on."

But nothing would induce them to stir ; and Pottinger, sick of delays, went on alone. Nor did one man follow, till a shout told them he had hit on the ford ; and five minutes later they were all scrambling up the farther bank. Here their journey ended in an open shed, which Pottinger and his friends had leave to share with six other men, one woman, three children and two bullocks. A log fire dried the clothes upon their backs while they ate coarse bread washed down with butter-milk, and, according to young Eldred's journal, "finished the evening tolerably well."

Three days later brought them to the gate of Shikarpore ; and after harassing search they cast anchor in a hovel, where Pottinger, wrapped in his cloak, burned and shivered for near a week, in spite of quinine. Then came prostration, which he disregarded, peremptorily demanding colour-juices and clothes in which he might venture abroad. They brought him a shirt and wide trousers of coarse white cloth, *lungis* for kummerbund and turban, and rough laced boots. They brought news also that the Afghan merchants had combined to form a *kafila*.[1] Surely it would be well to travel thus through a country where men live mainly by prowess of matchlock and sword. Reluctantly Pottinger agreed. He would sooner have marched unhampered and taken his chance ; but he endured the new departure with characteristic stoicism. But the delays and deviations of his soldier friends were as nothing to the vagaries of this noisy Afghan crowd that straggled and loitered through thirty

[1] Caravan.

miles of unhealthy jungle, till they reached the Seistan desert, bare as the blue above, save for the faint line of route traced by the feet of wayfarers and the bones of those whose *kismet* had been evil.

Two leisurely night marches brought them to an oasis ; and the prospect of further delay spurred Pottinger, with a small party of Afghans, to push on that very night. They marched from dusk to dawn ; and breakfasted among the awakening fields and gardens of Bāgh. The brief rest here was not unwelcome ; for intermittent fever was sapping Pottinger's strength. But directly his body revived his impatient spirit urged him on.

Seventeen miles from Bāgh they fell in with the encampment of Allah Dad's clan, faring north-west like all the world at this season of almond blossom and young corn. The moving village was composed of primitive black blanket tents ; and here the chief made them welcome, with salutations and embraces, and such a royal meal as they had not eaten for days, ceremoniously laid on a couple of coarse towels mottled with the stains of years.

Pottinger allowed himself and his companions two nights' rest with the friendly Sirdar ; and at daylight on March the 28th set out to cross the passes into the valley of Pishin, his party swelled by the chief's son, Juma Khan, and a couple of matchlockmen for guides.

Here, among the stony Afghan hills, hardships of a new order awaited him : days of toiling up rocky paths, slipping and stumbling among the pebbles and boulders of torrent-beds ; days of blinding glare, of incessant feud between sun and wind ; nights when the wind so triumphed that no fire could live in the open—which meant going empty to rest. And through it all Pottinger must contrive to steer a mildly remonstrant camel, whose every leg seemed animated with a perverse will of its own ;

to make notes and rough sketches of the route, and to imbibe as much information as could be gained without the risk of asking direct questions.

On the last day of March they fought their way across the Pass in the teeth of a hurricane, and at nightfall dropped down where they stood, too numbed and footsore to move, though the reward were fire and food. Four days and nights the gale raced and roared, buffeting them without mercy; so that even afoot the stoutest went in danger of being blown from the path. The fourth night found them on the plain of Mastung, in a traveller's hut of the darkest and dirtiest, but at least a shelter from the rain that fell in torrents with the passing of the gale.

Day broke blue and clear, and the high-road to Khelāt promised miles of smooth going for the camel people, whose feet had been cruelly cut in crossing the hills. Pottinger's own feet were blistered; but in pity to the laden beasts he walked the greater part of each march, and made his men follow suit, to their surprise and disgust. Edul Khan—whose temper had lately been out of gear—sulked openly, and treated Pottinger with a covert impertinence hard to endure. For a while prudence curbed the Englishman's temper. Then he spoke privately to the Duffadar and Juma Khan. The former shook his head and tugged at his beard.

"Hazūr, the Captain Sahib thought highly of the man; so I feared to speak of his evil nature lest it be esteemed backbiting. But his Jemadar bade me keep close watch over him lest harm befall."

Here was an unlooked-for trouble; and Pottinger swore under his breath.

"You *should* have spoken. I would never have taken him had I known."

Allah Dad folded his hands in mute apology. "For that very reason, Hazūr, I feared to speak. Had he ever suspected that through me service was lost to him, I might have eaten bread one week—two weeks: no more."

He stated the fact quite simply: and in spite of hot vexation Pottinger smiled.

"Not a pleasant prospect, Allah Dad! But this is damned unpleasant for me. What are his grievances?"

"He was wroth at leaving the *Kafila*, and at the Sahib's order concerning the camels. He hath sworn to buy a *tattoo* [1] at Mastung and ride whenever it pleaseth him."

"*Bismillah!* It's time he should know who is master."

"Hazūr, have a care. He is an ill man to cross."

"For that reason I have already ignored his ill-humour too long. Bring him to me. *Hukum hai.*" [2]

Undoubtedly Edul Khan looked "an ill man to cross" as he stood before the Syud-subaltern scowling at vacancy. The snarl with which he answered Pottinger's first plain question had the effect of flint striking flint; so the other had need of all his hard-won self-control.

"It seems thou art not the strong man others have taken thee for," he said sternly, but without heat. "What is this I hear of buying a *tattoo* at Mastung?"

"I choose not to walk because fools regard camels' feet before their own. After Mastung—I ride."

"Not with my leave."

"Then without it!" Edul Khan flashed out. "I am in mine own country."

"But still in British service, under my orders."

"Nevertheless—I choose to ride."

The insolent swagger of his tone goaded Pottinger to fury.

[1] Pony. [2] It is an order.

"Ride to Jehannum and broil there!" he retorted. "I keep no *loocha* [1] and *badzat* [2] in my employ. If you disobey my orders we travel by different roads."

"Better for both, belike!" sneered the Afghan, his hand at his belt. "Since leaving Kutch my stomach hath been surfeited with hardships and ill feeding. I said when taking this service that my bread was gone."

He swung round and strode out of the hovel where they talked. But Pottinger, his flash of temper past, called him back.

"It is the devil in thine own heart that hath wrought this trouble, Edul Khan," he said quietly. "I take away no man's bread. Thou camest of thine own will; and being dissatisfied, art free to return."

"Return—*Wah!* to the child's play of mock warfare without bloodshed! Matchlocks be man-eaters in my country, where be no police-*lōg*—praise Allah—making outcry over a corpse or two. I go not back."

But Pottinger, feeling that an open breach were impolitic, preserved his more placable tone.

"Well then," he answered, "if thy foolishness hath left thee, I am willing thou shouldst march with us to-morrow."

"*Kya!*" [3] the man snapped like a vicious dog, and, receiving no answer, flung up his head. "I have been told to take mine own road. By the beard of the Prophet I take no other."

At that, Juma Khan and the Duffadar fell upon him with arguments, persuasion, threats; but Edul Khan's arrogance increased rather; so that Pottinger's temper flared afresh. Once, when the Afghan shouted contemptuously, "*Wah!* That Feringhi fellow is no *Lāt Sahib* that I should eat dirt to win his favour," Pottinger's

[1] Loafer. [2] Bad character. [3] What.

hand went involuntarily to his belt. But the pistols that should have been there were rolled up safely in his bedding, and the arrested impulse cooled his hot blood. Calling his champions to order, he dismissed the offender without a word.

Then the three took counsel in low tones. The Asiatics, in their zeal, had made matters worse than ever; and by way of reparation Juma Khan offered to detain the rebel at Mastung. But Pottinger refused to shift his own risk on to another pair of shoulders: and the chief's son, secretly relieved, advanced a guileless proposition —Afghan to the core. It would be a simple matter for the Sahib to feign forgiveness, and so pacify the son of Satan: then, when all was safely over, to punish him as he deserved. But the Sahib was troubled with a familiar spirit unknown to his comrades.

"It is not the *dastúr* of my country," said he, "to promise one thing and perform another. I see but one way out of the dilemma. We must hire some reliable men who will escort him to Bhuj, where they will receive payment from Captain Ward Sahib. If he refuse to go he is a deserter, and I shoot him on the spot. Tell him from me, Allah Dad; and let him decide."

"It is manfully spoken, Sahib," they applauded: and that night, before sleeping, he recorded the incident in his journal, adding, by way of comment: "I do not ever remember to have had to swallow so bitter a pill. I fully perceive if I choose to beg the scoundrel to accompany us that he would do so. But it would only open the door to constant repetitions of such conduct; and as I am, thank God, not totally friendless even here, I shall not show such disrespect to myself. Juma Khan has offered to detain him here; but this is entailing too much on him and his tribe, and may get them into trouble.

Besides, I have told Edul Khan too much of my plans to let him go loose as an enemy. So I see no resource, if he still continues obstinate, but the pistol."

4

Happily for Pottinger the pistol was not required. In the morning Allah Dad brought word that the devil had gone out of Edul Khan ; but they could not start at once, since the Sahib's black camel had gone dead lame. Pottinger was not sorry for a chance to rest and improve his Pushtu ; also it struck him that here was a pretext to get rid of Edul Khan without risk or friction. Since marching disagreed with him he should have leave to spend a month among his own people, with injunctions to rejoin their party at Kandahar, where Pottinger intended that he should find instead—an order for his return to Bhuj : a mild deception not to be cavilled at, in the circumstances. There was no trusting the man : and it was a relief to find that he himself had been about to suggest some such compromise.

Without a hint of friction, the matter was settled : and so an end of Edul Khan.

The middle of April found them in the valley of Pishin, where orchards had already blossomed and fields of young corn were embroidered with the wild iris and tulip of the hills. A breath from the snow-line tempered the sun's heat at noon ; but at dusk men sat round log fires, stirring the ashes with cold bare toes. It was round such a fire, in the travellers' room of an underground mosque, that Eldred Pottinger fell in with his friend Mohun Shah. The Syud, in spite of denial, had known him for an Englishman, had protested devotion to him-

self and all his race. A tent and ponies were placed at his disposal; and a Government letter, acknowledging services rendered to Arthur Conolly, was proudly displayed.

"Your Honour is one of the same *jāt*, that is easily seen," the good man concluded—and he spoke simple truth. "Pity that all the English in Hind are not of such noble countenance, treating with respect men of other creeds and other complexions. Harm is wrought often to English prestige through certain Sahibs, young and foolish, possibly of low caste, who think to show themselves *Bahādur* by scornful speech to men of dark skin. There was one in Bengal, at whose hands I suffered much. Your Honour may have heard?"

Pottinger had heard, and had not greatly heeded, though he had seen the young official's conduct severely censured in the papers. Considering the matter with enlightened mind, he pressed Mohun Shah to speak of it from the Asiatic point of view, and the talk that followed set him thinking to some purpose.

"I am ashamed," he wrote afterwards in his journal, "when I remember how often I have been actor or partner in such scenes of insolence. I begin to see that our customs regarding the natives are very erroneous, and the sooner they are altered the better. I also see that they notice our conduct in this respect."

This, from a subaltern in '37—and even to-day there are men in India who fail to grasp the fact that there individual character and conduct count for more, perhaps, than anywhere else on earth. That Eldred Pottinger recognised this early, and acted on the recognition, is a distinction he shares with some of the greatest names in our Anglo-Indian story.

For a week he lingered in Pishin, sketching maps and wrestling with Pushtu, in defiance of the fever-fiend

that clave to him through all his Afghan service. Then the Syud resolved to escort his friend in person through the dangerous country of the Kākur and Ghilzai tribes: and on April 22 the Bukhtiari merchant, who had entered the valley hungry and footsore, rode forth in state—his safe conduct to Kābul practically assured.

And now—an honoured guest of the Nawab Jubbar Khan—the young explorer awaited the acceptable moment to be gone; while May slipped past with its ecstasy of colour; its Friday pleasurings; its idle evenings in gardens musical with love-songs of nightingale and thrush. For Friday is the Mahomedan Sunday; and upon that day the royal apple orchard was transformed into a fair. Thither from palace and city followers of the Prophet flocked out, to take their fill of things more excellent than cheating, lust and intrigue. Women were there also, seeing, unseen; strolling and gossiping with their menfolk; looking like corpses set up on end, in their latticed *boorkhas* and loose leggings, brilliantly gartered at the knee. At such gatherings the men of Afghanistan are seen to good advantage; and Pottinger, like all Englishmen, was strongly attracted by their courage, vigour and independence. It needed closer intimacy to reveal the devils within; and it was well for his judgment of the race that he should have known at the outset two such notable chiefs as his host and the Barakzai Amir—first of his clan to ascend the throne of Afghanistan.

For they were not of the blood royal, these Barakzai Sirdars; though, as king-makers and upholders of kings, they had wielded supreme power over the conflict-ridden kingdom of Afghanistan.

Founded by Ahmed Shah, on treasure stolen from the

murdered Nādir Shah, the curse of violence and treachery had shadowed the empire from the hour of its birth. For so it had become by the time Ahmed Shah died; an empire stretching from the mountains of Tibet to the Sutlej and the Indus. For that royal legacy, his heir did little, beyond enriching it with six-and-thirty children, twenty-three of whom were sons.

Needless to follow in detail the murderous Afghan programme of rivalry, treachery and intrigue that rent the kingdom and speedily reduced the empire to a name. Suffice it that three of the royal brothers, in turn, were supported on the throne by Futteh Khan, the Barakzai Wazir; and, of these, the last was Shah Shujah-ul-Mulk —the man doomed, by a strange mingling of fate and folly, to be instrumental in one of the blackest chapters of Anglo-Indian history. His deposed elder brother retired, with a son, to Herāt. Thither, before long, came Futteh Khan, alienated by Shah Shujah's ingratitude, eager to assist in tilting him from the throne. So it came about that, in 1816, Shah Shujah fled to British India, where he settled down as a royal pensioner; and those early years of his banishment saw the rise of Dōst Mahomed Khan, a ruler of rare talent and power; though compelled, by ill-fortune and the Calcutta Government, to be in turn "the rejected friend, the enforced enemy, the honourable prisoner, vindictive assailant and faithful ally of the British in India." The brutal murder of his brother, in revenge for his capture of Herāt, gave him his chance, and he took it with the high-handed violence of his race. But the Barakzai did not profess to conquer for themselves. Futteh Khan had fought for the hands of princes; and Dōst Mahomed followed suit, for a time. Then he gave it up in disgust; fought openly for his own hand, and carried all before him.

But not until the death of an elder brother in 1826 did he sit in the thorny seat of power; and on that day, like an Eastern Harry V, he abjured the notorious excesses of his youth. From a daring, dissolute soldier, he was transformed into a ruler, the strongest and ablest Central Asia had seen since Nādir Shah. In 1837 he was at the height of his power, and had already proved himself a hero of true Afghan stamp and character. Ambitious, grasping, and not over-scrupulous, he was yet—as men of his race go—neither wantonly treacherous nor cruel. But in the unholy strife of Afghan politics a man must either fight ruthlessly for his own hand or die: and Dōst Mahomed did not intend to die—yet awhile.

For eleven years he had gone from strength to strength. Shah Shujah's two attempts to unseat him had failed signally; for the man lacked sinews, figurative and financial. The Sikhs gave far more trouble. Like restless waves they beat upon the Amir's rocky coastline, undermining the empire of Ahmed Shah. Peshawar was gone from him; Persia threatened to enforce her ancient claim on Herāt; and now an army under his favourite son. Mahomed Akbar Khan, was stemming the tide of invasion among the defiles of the Khyber Pass. From all sides came threats of storm; only to India and the British Government Dōst Mahomed looked hopefully for the sealing of a friendship that would stablish and strengthen him on his throne. Eagerly he awaited the coming of Burnes, whom in '34 he had treated as a personal friend, and who would assuredly befriend him in turn.

But May slipped into June. The orchards rained summer snowflakes: and still the only news from India was of a doubtful victory near Jamrud: no word of

"Sekunder" [1] Burnes, who was lingering in the Punjab at the court of Ranjit Singh. And still Eldred Pottinger waited—till the Kamrān scare had subsided and Persia seemed to have changed her mind about Herāt.

Then, as July drew to an end, he made secret preparations for his venture across the rugged valleys of Central Afghanistan, whose chiefs had an ill name for hospitality to strangers. But the chance of being first in the field outweighed all accounts of the manifold risks involved. The Syuds, who had agreed to join him, besought him to change his route—in vain. Chary always about discussing his own affairs, he was now more reticent than usual, it having come to his ears that the Amir might object to his plan of visiting Herāt. Not a soul, save those concerned, knew the day and hour of his departure. To Allah Dad Khan and Abdullah he confided his instruments and most of his books, bidding them take the longer, safer Kandahar route and join him at Herāt, where he would await their coming. It distressed him that he must leave his friend, the good Nawab, with no word of thanks or farewell; but he intended to write an explanation when a clear hundred miles lay between him and the capital.

5

It was late afternoon. From above the rugged mountain mass—blue-white against a bluer heaven—the sun drove great spokes of light into the valley, as Eldred Pottinger drew rein on a lesser spur, to scour the savage features of hill and valley with expectant eyes. At last, where all seemed emptiness, he found the thing he sought:

[1] Alexander.

a patch of dun-coloured excrescences clinging to a mass of rock already half submerged by advancing shadows. These he knew for the fort and village of Yakoob Beg, most inhospitable of Hazara chiefs. It was said that his pouches bulged with the blackmail he levied on strangers, and the prices of luckless ones whom it suited him to sell as slaves. The Feringhi—never having seen —he hated only a few degrees worse than the Sunnis of his own faith; he being of the Shiah sect.

Pottinger's hope was to slip past the village undetected just before dark. More eager than his comrades, he had ridden on ahead to reconnoitre and consider their safest plan of advance.

A glance at the fort and at the thread of track below it, convinced him that passing undetected with a string of laden beasts would be no easy matter. But the attempt must be made; and beneath his anxiety Pottinger felt that nameless stir of the blood common to all risk-loving men in the face of danger.

"See, Ahmed," said he, as the Syuds joined him, "the track lies close under the walls. To forsake it were madness. An hour's rest to let the dusk gather. Then we must take the risk, and trust in God."

So they rested for an hour. Then they took the risk —and trusted in God.

If the watchers were feasting or drowsy all might go well. But the little cavalcade had been sighted afar off: and even as they thought to pass safely, a door in the wall opened. They were bidden to enter in the chief's name.

Resistance being futile, they complied; and entering, found their host, with a score of companions, smoking and lolling in a stuffy twilight starred with cotton wicks aflare in saucers of oil.

"Remember, Sahib, we be Shiahs," Hussain contrived to whisper in Pottinger's ear; and the Sahib—a Sunni by profession—devoutly wished himself a clearer knowledge of all that his apostasy involved.

Their sonorous greeting, "*Salaam Aleikum*," came back to them in a broken echo; and the presents etiquette demanded were affably accepted. Followed a searching catechism from the chief, wherein Syud Hussain was spokesman. The fairy tale, transforming them into Shiah holy-men, from beyond Kābul, fell from his lips as naturally as a stream from its source; while Pottinger, hoping to avoid attention, took to his beads. But the eye of Yakoob Beg's cousin was upon him; and suddenly he nudged the chief. "If these be true Shiahs, let them be put to the proof. He of the fair skin and devout bearing hath doubtless all rules and doctrines at his finger-tips. Ask him."

"Yes, yes; ask him!" chorused the rest.

It was an awkward moment for Pottinger, who had scant knowledge of Shiah doctrine. His safety, and that of his comrades, hung on his own mother wit and the probable ignorance of his hosts. But if the chief were ignorant his cousin was not, as his questions proved.

Doctrine came first; and Pottinger confessed himself a devout follower of Ali, cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet. He stumbled more or less accurately through the names of twelve Khalifahs since Mahomed, even to Imam-al-Mahdi, in whose withdrawl and second advent all true Shiahs believe. But there were pauses and hesitations; and the eye of Alum Beg had an evil twinkle as he begged the holy one to name the five correct books of Shiah tradition.

Pottinger, aware of Hussain's clumsy efforts to help him out, dared not risk even a glance at his friend.

"Al Kāfi—Jāhzih——" he began; then—dead silence. The name of the third in order was clean gone from him, after the tricky manner of names: and while he stood there racking his memory, the quickened breathing of his companions seemed to fill all space.

Again that evil twinkle in Alum Beg's eye as he asked leave to disturb the holy one's reflections.

"Frail as a bubble in water is the memory of man," he sneered. "Mayhap thou hast also forgot——?"

But Pottinger had suddenly seen a way of escape.

"Sir," he interposed, with a fine mingling of dignity and impatience, "I answered to the best of my power. But, having spent many years as a soldier in Hindustan, little leisure hath been mine for the study of serious things. Now I am a free man it shall be otherwise. Possibly, in time, my knowledge may equal that of Alum Beg Bahādur."

The manly words sent a murmur of approval round the room; and at mention of India the chief again scrutinised this unusual stranger.

"Thou hast been in Hind?" he queried, to Pottinger's immense relief. "A country of many wonders, if travellers speak truth."

"Hindustan is greater than the power of man's tongue to enlarge it," Pottinger stated quietly. "A land of mountain and desert, of cities and temples beyond compare——"

"Yet not strong enough, by report, to withstand the Feringhis, who would seize all, from the hills to the sea, though their own miserable island is, to Hind, as a crumb to a cake of bread."

"Size and strength are not always children of one cradle," Pottinger answered, with a touch of warmth that caught the attention of one standing near him.

"Belike thou favourest the Feringhi dogs?" he demanded pugnaciously; then, turning to the chief: "Mayhap he is one of them himself! The people of Hind are reported black; and this Syud of little knowledge is fairer than we."

Once more the eyes of all were turned on Pottinger; and Hussain, distracted by the startling turn of events, opened a cross-fire of vigorous denial. But the accuser held his own; and the whole assembly fell a-wrangling—*crescendo, fortissimo, stretto*—as only Eastern and Southern races can, till Pottinger, confronting his host, begged leave to answer for himself.

A shout and a gesture stilled the uproar. Then the Feringhi stepped forward and spoke.

"Never before, O Yakoob Beg, in this land of open doors, has such treatment of travellers been known. We come as pilgrims, trusting to thy aid; having chosen this difficult route because the Hazaras being Mussulmans, we looked for good treatment at their hands. It is true that men from the plains of Hindustan are dark-skinned. But it is a land of many mountains, wherein are folk fair as Afghans."

The chief's nod signified conviction.

"Thou hast well spoken," said he. "None shall molest thee or thy friends. But the hour of prayer is past; and we would not hinder any man from rendering praise to Allah. We go to make our own devotions."

A few went with him; but the bulk remained: and it was soon clear that the new-comers had but exchanged one dilemma for another. Here, under a score of suspicious eyes, and in strict accord with Shiah rules, they must achieve the elaborate evening's programme of prayers and posturings and devout washings, without which no true believer dare approach his God.

So distasteful to Pottinger was this form of mockery that hitherto he had managed to evade it, and was now the more at a loss. Of the three, Hussain alone had knowledge of those minute differences in pose and phrase, which, if wrongly rendered, might prove their undoing. With a glance he bade his comrades watch, surreptitiously, and follow his lead; the which they did, their wits sharpened by the knowledge that failure might mean death—or worse. While reciting the stately opening verses of the Khorān—"Praise be to God, Lord of all the Worlds! The compassionate, the merciful!"—eye and ear must be kept unceasingly at strain. Thus and thus the hands must be set upon the thighs; thus the nose and forehead approach the ground; thus, with mutterings of appropriate texts, the fingers pass through the beard. Ridiculous and vexatious, it seemed to Pottinger, that a man's safety should hinge on trivialities so puerile. But his very annoyance so stimulated his senses that he came through the ordeal—a Shiah proven, in word and deed.

That night he slept in Castle Dangerous, heartened by the success that waits on daring, and hopeful of finding himself a free man on the morrow.

But the morrow passed, and the next day and the next, and still no hint of permission to depart, nor any possibility of pressing the matter without risk of arousing suspicion. To depart without formal leave were a breach of etiquette. Guests by name, they were prisoners in fact; and on the third day, under cover of curiosity, Yakoob Beg expressed a wish to examine their baggage. The wish was a command; and throughout this fresh ordeal Pottinger had need of all his coolness and self-control. Though his most compromising belongings had

gone *via* Kandahar, there remained items which, if rightly understood, would brand him as impostor and infidel. Yet must he sit quietly by, while half a dozen barbarians rummaged in his saddle-bags.

One flourished his little tin can of medicines; and amid a chorus of "*Yujubs*" and "*Wah-illahs*" Pottinger explained that these were being carried to a merchant friend near Herāt. Another snatched up his copy of Elphinstone's *Kābul*, and lighted upon strange pictures.

Instantly the rest closed round him. "Idols! *Bismillah! These* be no Shiahs who carry such wares."

Pottinger, taken aback, dared not risk an explanation that might only blacken their case. In despair he glanced at Hussain, who shouted with derisive laughter.

"By the Prophet's beard, *ye* are fools and ignorant, having seen no cities greater than your own mud ant-heap! These be no idols, but hand-wrought visions of men and places other than we know."

The chief, listening intently, glanced at Pottinger, whose impassive face belied his acute sensations. The rest soon tired of futile guessings and of Hussain's cunningly complicated answers; and as they took their leave, Pottinger ventured a hint about the need for marching on toward Herāt.

Yakoob Beg waved a princely hand. "Be not overhasty, my friend. Who travels slowest arriveth soonest; since he stumbleth not by the way."

That night, before sleeping, they discussed the possibility of flight. A new and sinister fear had been added to the vexation of delay. What if Yakoob Beg were detaining them in the hope that a passing slave-trader might repay him fivefold for the cost of a week's hospitality? What if he already had news of one? It was

a fear to chill the blood of the stoutest. But seeing no way out of the trap, they fell asleep resolved to leave the outcome in higher Hands.

Next day Syud Ahmed went down with fever; and the day after Hussain followed suit. So loneliness was added to all other miseries of Pottinger's plight; not least being his natural distaste for incessant imposture and deceit.

It was now the 6th of August, a week since they had entered the fatal valley. Pottinger sat in his own corner of the windowless, mud-walled room—shared by all three, for all purposes, day and night—writing up his journal, and devising bold schemes for flight. His young alertness fretted against the unseen chains that held him; and the day's events had reawakened fears of detection. So far, only good fortune and the interest of new arrivals had saved them from disaster. These last were leaving on the morrow; and Pottinger resolved once again to put forth all his powers of persuasion, to soften the heart of Pharaoh. Former failures gave him small hope of success. But his resolve held good: and—since luck is apt to favour pluck—the morrow found Yakoob Beg unaccountably weary of his guests; unaccountably ready to exchange them for parting gifts beyond their means. By noon they were under way, scaling the rocky glen; fever itself cured by the stimulant of freedom and draughts of mountain air.

Pottinger, always in the van, had a moment's breathing-space on the ridge of the spur; a moment to loqk back at the too-hospitable Hazara fort below.

Suddenly his heart stood still. It was as if an icy hand had touched him. For along the path they had trodden came three scurrying figures, who waked the echoes with shouts that plainly signified: "Halt—and return."

There fell upon all the blank silence of dismay. A few counselled flight. But Pottinger bade his party await the result; and the rest followed suit.

As it turned out, they were not needed. The Syuds only were to return; the fair one in particular having been specified by Yakoob Beg. This gave things a blacker aspect. Pottinger, convinced that he would be detained, was too disgusted for speech; and, with coolness cloaking trepidation, the three retraced their steps. For the moment hope was dead in them. There seemed no valid reason for their recall, save the hardening of Pharaoh's heart; and their own grew heavy as stones as they neared the esplanade that fronted the chief's castle.

Here was a great crowd of men in evident excitement. From the midst of them came a single shot, followed by prolonged cheers. What this might signify Pottinger knew not; but the sound of cheering had a magical effect upon his spirits.

Pressing boldly forward, he greeted the chief with the formal "*Salaam Aleikum*"; and received quite another greeting in return.

"Aha, Syud-jee, thou art too late," cried Yakoob. "I have no longer need of thee. I did but call thee back to make this gun go off; and behold, it has gone off of itself."

"I turned to be off too!" wrote Pottinger in his journal, "wishing him most devoutly a passage to Tartarus. But Hussain, having been too seriously frightened to let him off so quietly, burst into an eloquent oration that perfectly delighted me and astonished the Hazaras."

It was Hussain who thundered: "May the devil fly away with you and your gun! Perchance your Mightinesses imagine that we—holy men—will return from Herāt at your bidding every time it misseth fire? *Wah-*

illah! These lords of an ant-heap deem themselves kings of the earth!"

Then, fearful of having overshot the mark, he turned hastily, and strode off in the wake of his friend. And not, until they came safely to the strangers' hut outside the walls, did they dare sit down to vent relief and vexation in hearty laughter at their own expense.

6

It was toward the close of an unclouded day in mid-August that Eldred Pottinger first looked upon Herāt, with eye of a traveller and a mind visited by no foreshadowing of things to be.

Ten days of marching down from the desolate Hazara tableland had brought them out at last into a land of promise and of peace—the fertile valley of Herāt. Fallen long since from its ancient empiry, the city, by virtue of its key position, has always been recognised as one of the main gateways into India; and as such Pottinger regarded with a thrill of interest the irregular bastioned mass on its rampart of sun-baked earth.

Out of stark desolation they had emerged into an oasis; villages and forts, cornfields and orchards, such as they had not seen since leaving Kābul near a month ago. But by now the high tide of summer had turned. Tulip, poppy, thistle and the sweet low-growing wild rose had been scorched into mummied ghosts of themselves. The double line of poplars bordering the river fluttered here a yellow leaf, there a brown. Only the vineyards and orchards still flaunted their riches. Apricots, melons, peaches and grapes cheered the travellers with promise of the one unfailing refreshment Afghanistan has to offer.

And still, afar off, the inexorable mountains hemmed them in.

But as Herāt came more clearly into view, Eldred Pottinger's thoughts became focussed upon the many-towered, white-walled town, with its high main citadel upon the north side, and beyond it, in majestic outline, the dome and minarets of the great Masulla mosque—the glory of Herāt. He knew just enough of the rival influences at work in the Persian capital to feel certain that the rumours of invasion which had detained him at Kābul were not unfounded, merely premature; that Mahomed Shah, of Persia, would never rest content till he had broken down the independent petty monarchy of Herāt. But seeing no link between his own destiny and the vagaries of Mahomed Shah, he merely hoped to be well on the road to Merv before any such contingency should arise.

And now they came to the western gate, set in a mile-long expanse of wall, curtained and loopholed between the towers. Passing through it, they found themselves in a typical mud-built city of Afghanistan: a rabbit-warren of windowless houses, looking on inner courts for light and air; the streets mere gutters, unpaved, undrained, abounding in refuse-heaps from the blind houses, that would seem to lack nostrils as well as eyes. Yet can each Afghan city boast its own distinctive feature; and that of Herāt is the main bazaar, or Char-Soo, literally Four Streets. These cleave the city from north to south, from east to west; their terminals four iron-clamped gates; their focal point a domed market-place, where Khurd and Tartar, Afghan and Baluch, Mogul and Hindu jostle, shout and cheat one another in more or less friendly unison.

At the time of Pottinger's entrance into Herāt the

Char-Soo was partially covered by domed arches built without keystones and already falling to pieces. The holes thus made admitted shafts of evening light that splashed vivid silken hangings, carved woodwork and vessels of brass ; pyramids of ripe fruit, grain and spices ; bales of Persian embroideries and every form of native craftwork that Central Asia can boast.

But in August, 1837, the bazaars of Herāt contrasted dismally with the Charchutta of Kābul, which at this sociable hour of evening would be all astir with noisy, leisurely traffic. Here men moved hurriedly, as if in fear of their lives ; women and children were scarcely to be seen : and all who ventured out seemed in mortal haste to re-enter their dark, evil-smelling houses, where a measure of safety was theirs.

Before the new-comers had reached one of the large *seráis* that cluster about the Kandahar Gate, shop-fronts were vanishing behind clamped shutters ; and the few belated purchasers scurried into blind by-streets like marmots into their burrows. Though night had not yet fallen, the day's business was over. Puzzled and dismayed, the men from Kābul halted by the booth of one who clamped his shutters with trembling hands.

Hussain, as usual, spoke for his comrades. "So early to rest brings small profit, brother," said he. "Is it custom here ? Or is it for some reason ? "

"Reason enough, friend. And as for profit——!" Glancing sharply over his shoulder the Herāti laid a finger on his lips. "In this city the stones have ears—and tongues also. Surely ye are strangers that ye should ask ? "

"We be travellers from Kābul."

"Pass on with haste, then. Herāt is no city for honest folk. The Shah and his Wazir—devils in the flesh—"

—his voice dropped to a hoarse whisper—" be gone upon a journey to besiege some fortress of Seistān. But lest harmless folk prosper in their absence they have delivered us into the hands of the devil's spawn, son of the Wazir." Again that hunted backward glance. " Get home, friends ! Get hence to the *seráí* before the devils of hell are let loose in our streets. Allah go with you."

So the three, with their followers, rode on, puzzled no longer, but far from reassured.

Arrived at the *seráí*, the same tale greeted them—with variations. Here, in an open courtyard, horse-dealers, silk-merchants, holy men and men of the unholiest, were united for a moment by the common lure of the road. Among these the new-comers sat them down to an evening meal of curry, *chupattis* and curds ; one bowl for all, and unwashed fingers for spoons. Pottinger—though more or less inured to the companionship of men strangers to soap and alive with vermin—still shrank from this primitive form of fellowship. But to-night hunger demanded satisfaction at any cost ; and the need of tobacco was strong upon him. The day's march had been a severe one ; and searching inquiry revealed no trace of his former comrades Abdullah and Allah Dad Khan.

Silent always in a mixed company of strangers, his ears were quick to catch the talk of others ; talk that no new arrival could hear without misgiving. Some said that the Shah and his Wazir were on the eve of return ; all seemed agreed that the coming of the Persians was now a matter of months. Nor did all regard it as a calamity. For the Herāti, like the Persian, is a Shiah ; and the Afghan Sunnis found sect antagonism a useful cloak for their love of tyranny and rapine.

He who sat next to Pottinger, and had spent two weeks in the benighted city, dared to speak more openly than

the rest, because to-morrow he would be on the road again.

"Consider only that which befel, a week past, to him with whom I lodged," he concluded, leaning closer to the pseudo-Afghan and regarding with frank curiosity the colour of his eyes. "One that lived uprightly, harming neither man nor beast. Hearing sounds in his out-house, after dark, he peered within and knew the intruder for a thief of evil repute. Therefore he roused myself and other friends, and we delivered that son of Satan to the Kōtwal. Next morning, before the young Sirdar, my friend told the tale straightly; and the thief told another. Hearing cries in the night, that valiant one had run forth with proffers of help. For reward he had been seized and falsely accused by these dogs of Herātis. It was the word of one man against six, and that one a *budmásh*. But it pleased the young Sirdar to assure the six they lied. My friend was sold to a Turcoman slave-dealer; and we witnesses were fined so heavily that all save myself were driven to debt. Two were sold yesterday. As for the thief—it is now known he is in the Sirdar's service, and has reaped a bag of rupees for his pains! Such is the present fashion of justice in Herāt! Let the Persians come!"

The tale roused a hubbub of comment among those who sat near; and under cover of it Pottinger slipped away. Dead tired, sickened and disgusted, he found a shadowed corner near the stall where his beasts were tethered. A pair of saddle-bags served him for pillow; and with his Afghan cloak for covering he lay down on the bare earth and fell into a deep sleep.

But it did not last. Before midnight he was awakened by the stifling atmosphere and by a restless pariah pursuing fleas. Within the *seráí* a great silence had fallen.

But without, the tools of the Sirdar were audibly astir: the tramping of many feet, rough challengings, followed by the dull thud of blows on human flesh and shrieks for mercy that went up unheeded—Devils of hell let loose indeed!

The uproar seemed to increase as the night wore on. But once more weariness prevailed; and Pottinger fell asleep again upon a fervent hope that his friends from Kutch would not keep him waiting long in this accursed place, where neither profit for himself nor others might be his.

7

The seventeenth of September found him waiting still —not so much for his comrades as for the sextant, compasses and books, too precious to be lightly abandoned. Visions of further travel grew fainter with each week of delay; and he could now only hope to achieve a return journey to India by a different route.

The long hot days were spent in writing and studying, whenever his old enemy fever would permit; his evenings, in exploring the city and its relics of vanished greatness. If energy failed him, hours could be idled away under the shade of giant plane trees, set, among the roses of the Bāgh-Shah and Gāzur-Ghur, beyond the walls; or in long talks of India with the very holy Fakir, who had tramped a thousand miles or so from Delhi to end his days sitting at the gate of the great Masulla mosque. That marvel of twelfth-century workmanship —twenty-five years a-building and then left incomplete —suffered destruction some fifty years later, when Herāt was threatened by a siege more formidable than the first.

But in 1837 it stood undesecrated. The glazed mosaic tiling of gateway, cupola and minarets still glowed in the strong sunlight; the prevailing flower-pattern wrought in mellow tones of brown and copper-green and flashes of turquoise blue, on a ground the colour of ripe corn. Purely Persian in design, it was a legacy from the days when art was the handmaid of religion.

From the base of the plateau stretched ruins and again more ruins of some vaster ancient capital; remnants of baths, public buildings, temples and tombs, from the mosque proper to the heap of stones, with its fluttering wisp of rag, to indicate that the bones beneath were holy. When to rags were added the horns of wild goats, one might infer exceeding holiness. These and other details Pottinger learnt in long rambles with his Kābul friend, Syud Hussain, himself a traveller, and somewhat cynical in his view of men and things.

Said Pottinger, noting the prevalence of rags: "You Afghans must be a nation of holy men, *Syud-jee*!"

And the other answered, chuckling in his beard: "Behind some of those graves there be strange *histories*! Enough for an Afghan to stumble on an heap of stones and a rag or two. At once he will devise the serviceable saint beneath; pile on more stones, tear a strip from his turban, set it on a stick—and the wonder is wrought! Others will add more rags, more stones. Some Mullah, of his generosity, will add a legend"—Hussain's left eyelid flickered—"and thereafter come pilgrims, miracles, many rupees. Verily, a dead dog, among Afghans, hath more power than many live lions. Even these twin devils, the Wazir and the Shah, will be worshipped once the flesh is off their bones."

A prophecy duly fulfilled.

On the whole, but for minor miseries of dirt, greasy food and hourly risk of personal attack, the life was less unpleasant than might be supposed for a man partially inured, eternally interested in customs other than his own. The coming of the Persians was now a certainty. It would be well to leave before the country became too unsafe for travelling. Yet still he lingered, hoping to recover the treasures he had been wiser not to part with at all.

In this mood, he rode away from the city on that blazing September afternoon to watch the return of Shah Kamrān and his army from a toy campaign. Out of their rabbit holes the people had crept forth, and clustered on the flat roofs and walls, in no spirit of loyalty or rejoicing; simply in a common impulse of eagerness for any *tamásha*.

Arrived at the foot of a ruined building, Pottinger was hailed by a party of Afghans, as the cry passed from house-top to house-top, "They come! They come!" And tethering his horse, he climbed to the nearest point of vantage.

Leisurely there emerged from the heart of a dust-cloud a straggling procession: baggage mules and horsemen, criers and executioners, flourishing grisly Afghan knives and tiger-headed maces of brass; horses, regally equipped, followed by his Highness the King in a litter of scarlet cloth. Thickset and pock-marked, there was little of kingliness or power in the aspect of Shah Kamrān, last but one of a self-extinguished race. His very title had long been little better than a gilded toy. But to-day, seated in his scarlet litter, royally clad, his unimposing forehead crowned by an imposing turban, the toy seemed almost the real thing. His people shouted—merely from instinct; and he, looking forth, returned their greeting with an air of kingly graciousness empty as his title.

So he passed on with his escort of princes, eunuchs and physicians, giving place to the greater man, Yar Mahomed Khan, content to ride second, because in all that mattered he stood incontestably first. Him Pottinger scrutinised more keenly, for something of the Wazir's character—his unscrupulous ability, his traffic in human flesh—was already known to those interested in the stormy politics of Central Asia.

Here, at least, was power—brutal and barbarous; the virile force that makes history. Coarse, cruel lips, aggressive brows and sharply-sloping forehead were counterbalanced by a handsome beard and eyes singularly compelling; eyes that perhaps explained why the men who were his tools, though they hated him secretly, failed him never. Before him went the infantry, a motley crowd the worse for wear; behind, local chiefs with the main body of Afghan cavalry, in a rough attempt at uniform. And as he, too, passed on, the Englishman, looking after him, recognised that there went a force to be reckoned with—not by himself, he hoped.

The procession ended as began, in a swirl of dust devils. City walls and house-tops took up the dutiful shout of welcome. Then the Herātis crept back into their holes; and Eldred Pottinger, riding through the silence and the haze, debated the wisdom of making himself known. Fresh news of a *kafila* expected from Kandahar inclined him to give his egregious comrades one more chance; in which case it might be safer, and certainly more congenial, to have done with the wiles and evasions of disguise.

Instead of riding on to the city, he dismounted at the Bagh-Shah for a stroll among its fading rose-bushes. The place was almost empty. But evening strollers would arrive before long; and footsteps behind did not disturb

his train of thought. It was broken by a hand on his arm, and a deep voice speaking in Hindustani—

"Sahib, these many days I have watched, saying, 'This is no Afghan!' Now I am assured."

Pottinger turned sharply upon the owner of the voice, a benevolent Mahomedan, whose smile of welcome was obviously sincere. "By what cause? And who art thou?" he asked, not at once unbending.

"I am one Hakeem Mahomed Hussain of this city, lately returned from a journey. I am also, from my heart, the friend of all who serve the young White Queen. Your Honour can speak without risk to one who has served Conolly Sahib; may Allah grant him health and high promotion!"

"Conolly Sahib?"

"He is known to your Honour?"

"By report only."

"Great, then, is the pleasure to come. All who knew him here can bear witness that, young as he was, through his wisdom and uprightness, he made the English no less famous in Herāt than did Elphinstone Sahib at Kābul. But I, who served him, know, better than all, his nobleness of heart. Me he took with him to India, knowing my wish for further skill in the use of drugs, and placed me in the College of Medicine at Calcutta. There I became so much overflowed with new learning; so that I can now help these suffering folk of mine own city. The Sahib hath seen?"

Pottinger nodded, frowning. "I have seen."

"Your Honour's heart is inflamed because of tyranny and torture. Such are not the ways of the English. But here——! Evils so shameful are beyond speech. You also are travelling, like Conolly Sahib, to increase knowledge?"

"Yes; I am an officer of the Bombay Tōp-Khāna,[1] exploring the country. But I have been hindered and delayed, awaiting two comrades from Kandahar. Now I leave shortly, come they or not."

"And your Honour would remain unrecognised?"

"Yes; but to-day I have been thinking—by reason of the Shah's return——"

"Sahib, that is a good thought," the Hakeem broke in eagerly. "But say rather by reason of Yar Mahomed Khan. In *his* hands are the lives of all. If the Sahib avow himself, all may be well. But if suspicion arise——" he spread out both hands expressively. "Much trouble might follow, even to imprisonment through hope of ransom. Lose no time, Sahib. His eyes are in every corner of the city."

Pottinger regarded his new acquaintance thoughtfully. "You are a good friend, Hakeem Sahib."

The Moslem salaamed. "Your Honour's welfare is as my own; and my house is at your service from this hour."

If his words had a touch of Eastern fulsomeness, events proved their sincerity. Pottinger, after a moment's thought, accepted the invitation.

"And the Sahib will no longer delay to make himself known?" the Hakeem insisted.

"To-morrow I will wait upon Yar Mahomed Khan," Pottinger answered: and, so answering, rounded the second great turning-point in his life.

8

THE house of Yar Mahomed Khan differed from that of the ordinary mortal mainly in size, and in the fact that

[1] Artillery.

its entrance courtyard had the appearance of a barrack square. Here newly-pressed recruits were drilled under the Wazir's supervision; and at all hours the place was thronged with soldiers, petitioners or lesser chiefs, who would spend the whole day awaiting an audience, so long as hookahs and gossip were to be had.

Now, into the midst of these came a Syud of northern aspect, who announced himself as a traveller, desiring immediate speech with the Wazir; and his *kismet* being favourable, delay was short. Calm without, anxious within, he followed his guide through the dusk of inner passages and rooms to the sanctum of the tyrant, whose eyes were in every corner of the city.

Yesterday he had seen the potentate: to-day he saw the man. Fresh from his bath in simple white clothing, Kashmir waistcoat and black Persian cap, Yar Mahomed sat in the mud alcove of his dressing-room, and, rising, graciously returned the stranger's salaam. Then, because it was not meet to come empty-handed and his possessions were few, Pottinger presented a pair of detonating pistols, the most valuable gift at his command.

It seemed the gift was propitious, for the Minister smiled; and, smiling, revealed teeth like weather-worn tombstones, crooked and discoloured.

"Be seated, friend," said he, with a courteous suavity that almost redeemed his evil aspect. "Your holiness is from Afghanistan?"

"No, from India," Pottinger answered bluntly. "I am an officer of the White Queen's Army."

Yar Mahomed suppressed a start of surprise, and his glance dwelt more purposefully upon the stranger's face.

"Blue eyes be rare in my country. I should have known. The Sahib travels for pleasure?"

"Yes, and for better knowledge of men and cities. I

had need to adopt the garb of a holy man in passing through the Hazara highlands."

"The Hazara highlands? A brave man! Next to gold, we Afghans love nothing like courage. And since the coming of Conolly Sahib your countrymen have been welcome in Herāt. Show me your heart openly. Have no fear."

Thus encouraged, Pottinger told his tale—straightly, yet with due reserve.

The Wazir declared himself overjoyed to entertain a nephew of one so well reported as Colonel Pottinger Sahib of Sindh. And he came in a happy hour: for the Minister Sahib, at Teherān, had often urged the wisdom of sending an envoy from Herāt to the *Burra Lāt Sahib* [1] of Hind. What better opportunity than the present? Thus would his guest's safe-conduct be assured and his own friendship for England doubly proved. He did not add that thus also would his guest be kept under the eye of men instructed to report his every speech and move. He merely begged the Sahib would wait a while longer, that he, Yar Mahomed, might enjoy the pleasure and profit of his society, and might have time to receive certain expected advices from Sir John McNeill. Delay again. But refusal were impolitic, and since he could travel no farther, Pottinger consented to wait a week or two in the hope of regaining his lost property after all.

He waited, a welcome guest in the house of Mahomed Hussain; glad to dispense with colour stains, and all that these implied. The Wazir's friendliness was unfailing; but two weeks expanded into a month, and still no sign of Allah Dad Khan, nor word of permission to depart. Seven months of living with Orientals cures a man of

[1] Governor-General.

counting the hours and days as though they were seed pearls ; but Pottinger's small stock of money was dwindling, and time enough must be allowed for unforeseen exigencies on the return journey. By October, the Persian army was reported well beyond Meshed, and he had no wish to be caught like a rat in a trap.

At the end of the month, having but five ducats left, he sent word to the Wazir, begging him to nominate an envoy and give him leave to depart. For answer, his presence was requested at the Minister's house forthwith.

He was received this time in Yar Mahomed's private hall of audience, where he and a posse of local chiefs passed the time : and, as usual, he was made heartily welcome, even to the elaborate Afghan embrace.

Then said the Wazir, motioning him to a seat of honour : " This is no true friendliness, O Pottinger Sahib, this eagerness to be gone when trouble is at our door."

" But, Wazir Sahib, consider——"

" Nay, listen. For the present I send no envoy to India. Instead, I request that you prove the good feeling of your country for mine by staying in Herāt to give us help and advice. In plain speech I will not let you go."

Here was a *volte-face*, startling as it was unwelcome.

" Is it friendliness on your part, Wazir Sahib ? " Pottinger protested, not without heat, " to bid me remain, when you know I am not free to go or stay. If your soldiers take leave, must they not return in a given time ? If I overstay my leave, I lose promotion and also any *izzat* [1] I might otherwise earn by my travels. Consider, then, if I am blameworthy in asking leave to go."

Yar Mahomed scowled thoughtfully at the Persian rug on which he sat. To blame this straight-spoken son of

[1] Honour.

Britain were folly; impolitic, also, to retain him against his will. But the Wazir was a shrewd judge of character. He had recognised the uprightness and courage hid beneath Pottinger's unobtrusive bearing; and had, no doubt, perceived how these might be turned to his advantage. A soldier of the White Queen was not his to command. But there were other methods; and, when necessary, Yar Mahomed could be the most plausible and persuasive of men.

When he looked up again, the frown was gone. "You are right, my friend. If you feel bound to go, I have no power to command that you remain."

At that all the chiefs set up a clamour of remonstrance, declaring, in spite of earlier swagger, that without this English officer to reorganise the defences and speak with the enemy, Herāt would fall at one blow.

While they argued, Yar Mahomed appealed to Pottinger, with hands eloquently outspread. "You see how it is with us, Sahib? So great is our faith in the Feringhi when there is fighting and difficult work to be done. Also, you have eaten our salt, and it is not our custom for guest to desert host in the time of trouble. Can no arrangement be made with your Government?"

This cunning appeal to the other's generosity took effect. Pottinger's belief that the city must fall quickened his British predilection for the forlorn hope.

"Sooner than seem discourteous, Wazir Sahib, I am at your service," he answered simply—burning his boats. "I will take the chance of my explanation being accepted by Government. But I fear you will find me quite a useless person, having no political authority to interfere in your affairs, and small knowledge of British relations with foreign states."

Yar Mahomed, having gained his point, dismissed minor

considerations. Pottinger must needs endure a second embrace and an ovation of Eastern compliment.

"Friend and ally of princes in distress! True source of a valorous and noble origin, may God prolong your days! May you be upon the carpet of wealth and fortune and rise to the seat of magnificence and power. As for lack of knowledge and authority, our *izzat* is increased merely by your presence. With the Kajjar,[1] I am told, come two gentlemen *Sahibān*. It is meet that Herāt also should possess a gentleman Sahib to speak with them, and enforce a fair bargain."

Such words from such lips made Pottinger smile to see how completely change of position will change the point of view. But the assurance that Sir John McNeill would accompany Mahomed Shah set his last doubts at rest; and he went forth to think over the new turn of events.

First he must write to Captain Burnes, long since settled at Kābul, where he had been treated with confidence and friendliness by Dōst, and hoped to achieve the closer alliance with England on which the Amir had set his heart.

To his uncle in Kutch, Pottinger wrote a fuller account of himself and his position: and thereafter devoted himself to repairing defences, that at many points were crumbling to decay.

About this time runners brought news that the Persian army had reached Toorbāt, not a hundred and fifty miles distant. The advance guard, alone, was reputed ten thousand strong; and Herāt, from a population of seventy thousand, could but muster ten thousand troops all told. Her effective fighting force numbered only half that amount, undisciplined and ill-trained. With these and

[1] Persian.

ten guns—such as they were—four miles of wall must be defended against an organised army, far too well provided with cover, in the shape of villages, ruins and orchards, crowding to the very base of the gigantic earthworks, their rock of defence.

But if the enemy found cover ready to hand, he should at least not find forage and food. These were poured into the city from surrounding villages; and with them came peasants craving protection. Streets and bazaars swarmed with them. The very ruins were tenanted. But to bring in all the produce of that fertile valley was beyond human power; and the word went forth that the residue be destroyed.

To these wholesale precautions without, Yar Mahomed added precautions within against the ever-present danger of treachery or open revolt. These took the form of fines, torture or imprisonment wherever infidelity was suspected: more often, perhaps, wherever hid treasure was rumoured to exist. The man's greed amounted to a disease; and now there was added the stimulus of necessity. All Herāt knew this, and trembled; each asking the other, "Who will be the next?"

On the ramparts a wholesomer activity prevailed. The noise of building, the ring of the hammer upon iron filled men's ears all day and often half the night. Scout parties went forth to harry the advancing troops and cut off stragglers. These returned with few prisoners, loudly denouncing the Persians as the most contemptible cowards in Central Asia. Was it ever heard, that soldiers should march in a mass guarded by guns, like a crowd of women, instead of straggling abroad to display their valour and give the enemy a chance to do likewise! Wait only till those women-warriors sat down before Herāt! Meantime, the tale of preliminary captures multiplied,

like the men in buckram, and the less adventurous were impressed.

As for Eldred Pottinger, wherever active, honest work was toward, there he was to be found; directing, exhorting, putting his own hand to the plough. For him the whole affair was a unique adventure, undreamed of in his wildest imaginings. After weeks of aimless waiting, the demand for action and the prospect of warfare stirred the fighting blood in his veins. True, his undefined position bristled with difficulties; but like all men of practical power, he gave himself up to the present moment, the present need. As regards the future, it was his to uphold—in word and act—the character of a British gentleman, by the grace of that God in whom he believed with a whole-hearted faith, less rare in the early days of Victoria than in those of King George.

And still—day by day—the Persian force crept nearer: a force formidable enough to make short work of Herāt, in spite of swaggering Afghan heroes and a Feringhi officer Sahib, who spoke little and achieved more than all the said heroes put together.

A sharp spell of frost, in early November, raised hopes that a severe winter might prevent the horrors of a long investment; but on the 15th came couriers from the frontier with news that startled and dismayed the bravest. The fortress of Ghoriān, reputed stronger than Herāt, and defended by a picked garrison, had surrendered to the Shah. A disaster so unexpected suggested treachery or cowardice: and the Wazir took the blacker view. Openly denouncing Shere Mahomed, he pushed on the defences with redoubled zeal, that it might be seen how a true Afghan would defend his own.

On November the 22nd the advanced guard formed up on a wide plain to the north-west, and Mahomed Shah's

field artillery gave them greeting. Guns from the city towers flung back the challenge, and a preliminary skirmish ensued. On the 23rd came the great main body—Persian and Russian, but no British Ambassador, to Pottinger's regret. McNeill had sent, instead, his assistant, Colonel Stoddart, to look after British interests and, if might be, patch up a reconciliation between Shah and Shah.

But now the word was War. Earthworks were thrown up, a vast camp sprang into being. Ruins, orchards and enclosures were occupied in force. The siege of Herāt had begun.

BOOK II

SOLDIER

We take up the task eternal, and the burden, and the lesson—
Pioneers! O Pioneers!
Conquering, holding, daring, venturing, as we go the unknown ways—
Pioneers! O Pioneers!

. . . . . .

Not for delectations sweet;
Not the cushion and the slipper; not the peaceful and the studious;
Not the riches, safe and palling; not for us the tame enjoyment—
Pioneers! O Pioneers!

WALT WHITMAN.

I

War, that breeds heroes and proves men, as the furnace proves the potter's vessel, has few horrors to rival that of a protracted siege. And in an Asiatic city horror is increased by gratuitous brutality, by dirt and lack of discipline, or the power to act in unison.

Such were the conditions at Herāt when thirty thousand Persians sat down beneath her ramparts and opened hostilities. But at that time neither side dreamed of a protracted siege. Mahomed Shah was out for conquest; and the most sanguine Afghans did not expect to hold out more than a few weeks. To Pottinger it was plain that the Persians needed only engineers and a skilled general to carry all before them.

As it chanced, they possessed neither, but were at the mercy of many masters. Unity of plan or concerted action there was none. With true Oriental improvidence, they exhausted their ammunition in spasmodic outbursts of firing, too erratic to do much mischief. But the whistle of bullets and the flaring rush of rockets overhead added a new terror to life in Herāt. Shells thrown less at random left ruin in their wake; dust, charred woodwork and human fragments horrible to see. But chiefly the firing was directed against the parapets; and the mass of rubbish, falling inwards, was utilised by Pottinger to support the battered fortifications. Thus, the body of the old rampart became a

parapet, a point of vantage for defending breaches when made.

Whether these ever could be made became more and more a matter of question as day followed day, and Persians gave no sign of an organised attack, or of a bold attempt to take the place by escalade. By means of spasmodic sorties the Herātis carried on, with more dash than science, their spirited defence. Three out of the five city gates were kept open; supplies brought in and cattle sent out to graze. By night they harried the Persian sappers and plundered their tools. By day the heads of the slaughtered were paraded on the ramparts, to Pottinger's infinite disgust. For the Afghans, the public flaunting of their prowess was the best part of the fun; and on account of rewards, since rewards were forthcoming, the warriors outvied one another in their zeal.

"Regard favourably, thou Mighty, the valour of this slave!" cried one, on a day of December, when Yar Mahomed stood on the works, with his young English ally, discussing the next sortie. A pair of blood-stained ears emerged from the speaker's tunic, and from his lips a lurid tale of his encounter with the victim. Presented with a cloak and a handful of ducats, he seized them and fled without staying for further boast or compliment.

Half an hour later came a fresh adventurer, disfigured with the stains of battle.

"The reward of courage, O most Valiant!" said he, and laid a mud-smeared head upon the ground.

Yar Mahomed, turning to give the order, kicked aside the pitiful object, and so became aware of a deficiency.

"Oh, ho! Was this unfortunate born incomplete?" he asked, with a grim chuckle. "Or be the ears God gave him hid in thy tunic for the next occasion?"

Without answer and without reward the hero vanished

from the ramparts ; and a retainer, picking up the trophy, recognised it for the head of a comrade fallen on the preceding night.

" *Inshallah !* these be mighty men of valour ! " shouted the enraged Wazir. " Go, belabour the scoundrel without mercy. And as for him of the ears—any man who can may possess himself of the cloak and ducats, ay, and of the long tongue that stole them. Shameful talk, to give lies in place of service for a mere handful of silver ! "

The bystanders dutifully chorused approval ; and Pottinger, musing on a certain tale of the pot and kettle, went back to his house.

That night it was told him in confidence that a Shiah Mullah, suspected of hidden wealth, had died under the hands of the torturers.

In this fashion December dragged to an end. Within a month some thousand rounds of ammunition had been wasted on mud walls unresponsive to any attention less rousing than dynamite or heavy cannon. Convoys had been dispatched for a fresh supply ; but their return would be a matter of weeks. Meantime the besiegers bethought them of methods more effective than spasmodic fireworks. Early in the New Year it was discovered that mining operations were being carried on at several points, a discovery that filled Afghans and Herātis alike with the bewildered terror of the unknown. Visible bullets were as nothing to the devil that worked in darkness under their feet.

It was while this new panic prevailed that Shere Mahomed—sometime Commandant of Ghoriān—appeared under the walls, demanding audience of the Wazir. The demand was refused in language more peremptory than polite ; and for answer came word of warning that unless Herāt were given up, he—Shere Mahomed—would be

slain, the city stormed, the Wazir hanged like a dog and his womenfolk publicly dishonoured.

But even in the hour of panic, Yar Mahomed was not to be browbeaten by empty threats.

"Bid the Sirdar Sahib carry my thanks to the Shah-in-Shah," was his retort courteous, "that he saveth *me* the trouble of killing a traitor who is no true brother of mine. *When* the city is taken Mahomed Shah may deal with me as he wills. I am his Majesty's most faithful servant. But the Afghans will not hear the surrender."

So Shere Mahomed went away sorrowing: and Herāt was not given up, neither was he slain nor the fortress stormed. But the incident had set Yar Mahomed thinking; and presently Pottinger was told that the Wazir wished to see him on a matter of importance.

2

Not without cause did Yar Mahomed Khan, of Herāt, become known as the Napoleon of Central Asia, though the Asiatic's genius was rather that of the keen-witted unscrupulous politician than of a conqueror and leader of men. Singleness of purpose—outside the paramount purpose of his own advancement—was a state of mind unknown to him. "Heads I win. Tails you lose," was his guiding principle: and he lived up to it. So now, while impressing on Pottinger his sincere desire for British help and British good will, he secretly assured his Eastern friends that all he wanted of England was gold. If that were not forthcoming, no longer would he tolerate the infidel within his gates.

The infidel's own opinion of the man and his methods is worth recording.

"The Minister, throughout all negotiations . . . invariably threw the blame of the defence on someone else. and regretted being obliged to fight. He also avoided mixing himself up with any act decidedly hostile to Persian prejudices; allowing some of his friends to act, and then, under a show (to the Persians) of inquiry, sharing the advantages. . . . With that shrewdness which characterises the Afghan nation, he saw the favourable position he was in and availed himself of it to the utmost. . . . He therefore addressed himself to the task of defence, but took steps to secure his own interest in the event of a reverse."

With just such a step in view he had sent for his young British friend, the one human being in a city of thousands on whom he could implicitly rely. In view of a possible catastrophe, it were well to approach the Great King with a diplomatic message of mediation.

He received his visitor alone, without formality; and a smile of mutual understanding passed between them.

A notable contrast at any time, these two; but the effect was heightened since Pottinger had washed the stain from his skin and the dye out of his brown beard. He still wore Eastern dress, for lack of any other; and a year's exposure had darkened him considerably. In both faces it was the eyes that struck the keynote of character. While the blue ones revealed a soul of steadfast nobility, the brown ones glowed with the fire and force of a mind unhampered by the soul's superfluous sensibilities. Both possessed physical courage, strength of will and individuality, by virtue of which they stood out in high relief from the confused background of that seething, suffering city. For the rest, day and night

had more affinity than they two ; and a friendly alliance between such mighty opposites had in itself all the elements of drama.

Yar Mohamed straightly broached his plan ; adding, with his disingenuous smile, "For such an undertaking there is but one man acceptable. No Afghan would venture : no Shiah could be trusted. Remaineth yourself. You are willing ? "

"Assuredly I am at your service. It will be a great pleasure to meet Colonel Stoddart and speak my own language again. You have letters ? For me ? "

He glanced eagerly at three folded and sealed slips in the Minister's hand ; for the superscription was English.

"One of them—from Kandahar. These others, for McNeill and Stoddart Sahib, you can deliver. But first, by God's goodness, we can overlook the contents."

At that Pottinger demurred. "Excuse me, Wazir Sahib, but if you open other men's letters you must find someone else to read them."

The Asiatic shrugged his shoulders. "A wise precaution, merely. You followers of the Nazarene lose much by your squeamishness. To-morrow you shall wait upon the Shah. To-day, because of his cough, he hath taken an over-large dose of the *dewai* [1] which cureth all ills ! "

He showed his discoloured teeth in an evil grin ; and Pottinger understood. Shah Kamrān, broken down by unbridled licence, was completing the process of degradation by drink. He, who, in lustier days, had ransacked the houses of his subjects with a band of armed retainers, seizing whatever took his fancy, from wife or daughter to a bagful of ducats, was now little more than the peevish appendage to a fluttering pulse and a haunting fear :

[1] Medicine.

the fear of a poisoned morsel or a knife between the shoulder-bones. As a matter of fact he was strangled—in Yar Mahomed's own good time. Meanwhile, little more than a puppet, he soaked in spirits and lived almost like a prisoner in the Arkino, the high citadel at the northern end of the town.

Thither Pottinger was led next morning: elated at the prospect of adventure that might release him from an anomalous position and Herāt from investment.

Arrived at the Arkino—a fort within a fort—he was ushered into the cheerless room of state, furnished with a carpet and cushions, with eunuchs and a chief physician always at hand to proffer some new and infallible *dewai*. At sight of his envoy a sudden spark glowed among the half-extinguished ashes of kingship.

"Aha! Pottinger Sahib, defender of our city, go boldly forth, bearing a Shah's message to a Shah."

A wild, incoherent message it proved; a long-winded tirade of mingled self-pity and reproach.

"Behold, how generous is the conduct of Mahomed Shah! Is it nothing that I refused help to usurping princes and rebellious chiefs, looking in return for troops and treasure to regain my lost kingdom? And my supplication is answered by the roar of cannon and bombs, cries of the wounded and odour of the dead! Say to him: 'Here be my women and children; I will die in their defence. I send to ask what requireth he at my hands?'"

Exhausted with his own eloquence the king lay back, breathing heavily; and Pottinger, eager for the morrow's venture, hurried away.

But when he called on the Wazir next morning it was only to find that obstacles had arisen and the whole affair was postponed. The sortie of the preceding night had

failed signally. There were reports afloat of an immense gun in active preparation: a gun whose bullets would pierce the walls of Herāt as if they were wood. To parley at such a moment, would seem a confession of weakness. Better wait till the Afghans had struck one resolute blow in their own defence.

This they achieved, with questionable success, on the 26th of January. But Asia has a genius for shirking the decisive issue; and not till the 7th of February did Pottinger win leave to depart.

In the interval he had been gladdened by the appearance of Allah Dad Khan, with all his treasures intact, and a tale of plausible adventures longer than his turban. As to these Pottinger had his own opinion; but it was much to recover his belongings and secure the services of a man he could trust. Allah Dad Khan might be stupid and hot-headed; but experience of Sahibs had taught him that straight dealing was the only way to gain and keep their favour.

On the morning of the 8th, then, Eldred Pottinger left his belongings with his new-found friend, and rode out of the gate that is called Kutb-Chak. Word of his coming had sped on before; so the streets between the tents were thronged with a shouting, surging multitude, and it was no easy matter to reach the Persian Minister's tent. Here, to his delight, Pottinger gained leave to call on Colonel Stoddart, who overwhelmed the bearded stranger with an Asiatic greeting.

Laughing heartily, the other answered in English; and Colonel Stoddart stepped back in amaze.

"What! Is it Pottinger—the soul of the defence? My man announced you as the *Moojtehid* of Herāt! This is a pleasure indeed. Coffee for the Sahib," he commanded, as they rid themselves of the crowd.

Only the Englishman who has spent months alone with Orientals can realise what it means simply to return an English handclasp, to hear an English voice. And these two were fellow-soldiers, fellow-pawns on the great chess-board of Central Asia.

Said Stoddart: "I'm told we owe it mainly to you, under Providence, that the Herātis are giving our Exalted One more trouble than he bargained for. Keep them up to it, sir; keep them up to it! We need *time* to shake a sleepy Government wide awake. Our news is beginning to disturb the *Burra Sahibs* at last. We shall soon have Sir John himself here as mediator. For a Persian victory means Russia dominant in Herāt. Are your people climbing down?"

"No. I'm only the bearer of polite messages and don't expect to accomplish much. I have letters——"

"Ah, Burnes! I was hoping for news. It seems the Bear has got her paw on Kābul now. But from all accounts Dōst Mahomed is giving Vickovitch the cold shoulder. Sekunder Burnes has his failings, and diffidence isn't one; but he'll square the Afghan alliance, if the Olympians give him a chance. Now for his letter. You shall share the news——" But steps and voices interrupted them. "Devil take these Asiatics!" cried Stoddart, whose patience was short and curiosity keen. "Resign yourself to leagues of irrelevant discussion!"

Pottinger had his fill of it before the day was out. They found the Wazir surrounded with the usual crowd of friends and retainers: a thin, small man of mean aspect and bilious temper. But they were graciously received; and Pottinger was asked of his message from the *Prince* Kamrān to the King of Kings.

"My message is from the Afghan king to the Persian king, and to no other," Pottinger answered straightly.

"As regards the greeting to yourself from Yar Mahomed Khan, I should prefer greater privacy."

It was accorded—not with the best grace: and Yar Mahomed's proposal that the Shah should return to Persia, whither he would follow, to give true proof of sonship, was dismissed with undignified contortions of disgust. Was not Herāt set down as a Persian province even upon the maps of Great Britain?

This last both officers denied; and, after long-winded arguments, Burnes' map was called for. They opened it: and lo, Herāt appeared within the Afghan border!

The volcanic little Wazir turned indignantly upon Stoddart.

"Why, then, Colonel Stoddart Sahib, hath the British Government, professing friendship with Irān,[1] never sent word to *us* of this insult on the map?"

Stoddart replied gravely that he had no instructions in the matter. His Government was not aware that Herāt had ever been *annexed* by Persia. He would refer the case to the Envoy.

The undernote of irony was lost on Haji Akasi; but at the word annexation, he writhed anew.

"*Bismillah!* How should the Defender of the Faith *annex* that which hath been his own since the days of Nādir Shah? Who careth for maps? Herāt remaineth a province of Irān. If the *Burra Lāt Sahib* thinks otherwise, let him send a man to tell me his mind. Then will I also send a man to your young Queen, Buktoria, that the province of Ireland belongeth not to her!"

"There be some that might agree with yōu, Haji Sahib!" Pottinger remarked, smiling. "But when am I to deliver my message?"

The small man sprang up in haste.

[1] Persia.

" I go to prepare the way. *Then* it shall be seen if the Asylum of the Universe will suffer dictation at the hands of Afghan or infidel."

The Asylum of the Universe did not suffer dictation.

Very plainly clad, and throned upon a cheap English chair, in the corner of a double-poled tent, his appearance scarcely sorted with his fulsome string of titles. But his personal servants stood with heads bowed above folded arms; and the British officers must approach humbly; pausing and salaaming three times during the process.

The interview lasted nearly an hour. It began in dignified fashion. It swelled to a bombastic outpouring; ended with the ultimatum that, unless his five proposals were accepted, he would yet place a garrison in the citadel of Herāt.

Since those five proposals included kissing the feet of the " Asylum," restoring prisoners and supplying troops for Persian wars, there remained no more to be said. The officers retreated backwards, saluting three times as before. Negotiations were at an end.

3

Throughout that night and all next day hill and valley were lashed by the Boreas of Central Asia. Rain, hail, wind and a knee-deep fall of snow that transfigured camp and fortress and veiled the battle-scarred face of the land. On the morning of the 10th, Eldred Pottinger carried back to Herāt the mortifying word of failure, that fell like a blight upon the whole city.

Delay had given time for hope to run high; and Pottinger, summoned to the citadel, did his best to soften

the blow. He could, at least, bring word of a dispirited army, unpaid since leaving Persia ; of increasing desertion and flagrant excesses that had converted every village into an enemy. Consoling news, that last.

The council of war that followed voted for British protection on any terms ; and that night letters were written to Lord Auckland, also to Burnes, through whom the appeal must be sent. Thereafter Pottinger made out his own unvarnished official statement, accounting for his presence at Herāt and his independent line of action.

To Burnes he wrote informally of his experience as envoy, adding : " The city is very much stronger than it was at the commencement of the siege, and the Afghans are confident and in high spirits. They want but money. . . . For my own part, I have little doubt, from what I now know of both parties, that the taking of Herāt by the present Persian army is little less than an impossibility."

Some misgiving of the kind must have disturbed Mahomed Shah, after his interview with that superfluous young Englishman. The 68-pounder that was to have broken up the walls of Herāt, had broken up, instead, its own ill-constructed carriage ; and lay, like a dead elephant, cumbering the ground.

Thus beset, the Most Exalted descended a step or two from his eminence. A few days after his inflated ultimatum, a Persian emissary appeared at the gate of Herāt : an emissary with peace upon his lips, and a private reminder that it behoved all true Moslems to make common cause against English aggression, under the Father of Victory, who would enrich them with the plunder of India and Turkestan !

But the slipperiness of Persia is proverbial : and Yar Mahomed—after consultation—sent answer that if the

Shah-in-Shah spake truth, he could prove it by removing his army from the walls of Herāt. As regards foreign mediation, the Afghans placed implicit confidence in Lieutenant Pottinger, and if the Shah would do the same by Colonel Stoddart, all might yet go well.

It might; though Pottinger had his secret doubts on the subject. He knew too well what it amounted to—the "implicit confidence" of a Yar Mahomed Khan: and for all his decisive bearing at critical moments, he was acutely alive to the difficulty and delicacy of his position. There were times of heart-searching, when he doubted whether—as an officer of a neutral Government—he had any right to take active part in the defence. He also feared lest his Afghan friends should misconstrue his zeal in their service and believe him to have been, from the first, a secret agent of the Indian Government. But, whatever the issue, to withhold practical help, so greatly needed, was not in the nature of the man. He could but meet each crisis as it arose, to the best of his power, and leave the event to God.

And still, throughout February and March, emissaries came and went. And still, while the lips of the Most Exalted spoke peace, he did not cease from strengthening trenches, or from carving cannon balls out of marble stolen from sacred graves. At last, investment was complete, and real pressure began to be felt. No provision had been made for a siege of months. Sheep and grain were already scarce. The water supply had been cut off; and all that remained in cisterns or reservoirs had become indescribably foul. Actual scarcity there was not, since water could soon be reached by digging. The one serious lack was money: how serious, Pottinger did not discover till March was half over:

and the fashion of his discovery was Eastern to the core.

A pressing invitation from the Wazir's scribe, Mirza Ibrahim, resulted in a rigmarole of hints and verbals amblings round about the most delicate subject on earth; till Pottinger, losing patience, asked bluntly: "Is it money you want from me, Mirza Sahib?"

But for his colour, the Mirza must have blushed at this naked presentment of his decorously draped request. Great was the penetration of the Sahib! There had been difficulties. Even strong pressure brought small result. But the Sahib must understand, he, Mirza Ibrahim, spoke without authority. The Wazir Sahib had, indeed, desired to speak: but the Englishman, being his guest, modesty forbade!

Pottinger smiled inwardly. If Yar Mahomed had taken modesty to wife the day of miracles was not over.

"Still," said he, "if I am to assist the Wazir in this delicate matter, he must overcome his modesty, so far as to tell me his difficulties, and his needs."

The Mirza bowed low and departed. But the process of overcoming Afghan modesty took time. Even when invited to dinner, the Wazir could not bring himself to broach the subject of money; and each fresh opportunity given found him increasingly coy.

At last the Englishman fairly lost his temper. "If the Wazir is *really* too modest to speak of practical matters," he said to the Mirza, "let him write!"

The ironic suggestion was solemnly accepted, and carried out. By formal notes in the third person, modesty was propitiated, and the way made clear for speech.

To Yar Mahomed's ingenuous suggestion that his ally should lend him money on the security of the crown jewels, Pottinger replied: "My friend, I am no merchant; and

if I have not the money, why not arrange with the Hindus, who could get it from Kandahar?"

But the Hindus, it seemed, shirked the risk of dealing with crown jewels; more probably, the risk of dealing with Yar Mahomed Khan. So Pottinger agreed to conduct the affair himself on two conditions: no foreign intercourse without the consent of Lord Auckland; no prisoners to be sold. Promises being cheap, were readily given; and that night three letters were dispatched to Alexander Burnes.

Pottinger's letter contained an informal tale of the transaction and his views on the situation.

"In my former letter," he wrote, "though I mentioned money, I had no idea of the destitution to which they are apparently reduced, and this knowledge has changed my confidence in their success. The result now depends upon the answer you send to this application. . . . I shall, much as I dislike the undertaking, endeavour to pawn the jewels, and trust I shall be able to raise sufficient to last till your reply comes. . . . Thus, having given you a statement of affairs, I beg to say a word of myself. Without any authority, I am acting the part of British agent here, thereby laying myself open to the displeasure of Government, not only for meddling in what does not concern me, but also for neglecting the duties on which I was sent to these countries. Except for the private communications of Colonel Stoddart and Mr. Leech, I am totally ignorant of the wishes of Government; but I have done and shall continue to do my utmost to preserve our interests here, taking care to commit no act of hostility which can be construed into involving the British Government. You wrote to me in October that you were authorised to send one of your assistants to this place. I shall consider it a personal

favour if you do so, and thus relieve me from the anxiety of my present situation ; and if not, that you will authorise me to act here on the part of Government till orders may arrive."

Such occasional comments, in demi-official letters, and extracts from the lost journal are all that remain to throw any light on Pottinger's personal thoughts and feelings throughout those long months of hardship, anxiety and strain. But, even from these, it is evident that no idea of gleaning honours or advancement visited his mind. A mild official "wigging," allowing for pressure of circumstances, was far nearer to his expectations : such being the common lot of unauthorised officers who have the courage to act independently at a crisis. No doubt he hoped, secretly, that if Burnes could relieve him, he might yet gain a fresh grant of leave to complete his frustrated journey of exploration.

Meantime it was his—without authority or political knowledge, and with small experience of actual fighting —to preserve the independence of Herāt to the best of his power. In this sole purpose he and Yar Mahomed were at one. By this time, both armies were heartily sick of the struggle ; but on certain points neither monarch would give way. So long as the Shah-in-Shah demanded acknowledgment of sovereignty, there could be no hope of peace.

Yet on that night of early April the British Ambassador from Teherān had halted but four days' march from the city, and with him came his assistant sĕcretary, Major D'Arcy Todd, a Bengal gunner, whose name was destined to be linked with Herāt almost as closely as Pottinger's own. The move, prophesied by Stoddart, had been precipitated by a letter from Leech at Kandahar ;

and McNeill—authorised to denounce Persia's enterprise as an unfriendly act—had hurried down to the camp, without awaiting official instructions. For at that time, rightly or wrongly, it was believed that the fall of Herāt would be but a prelude to further Russian aggression and intrigue, under cover of supporting the claims of Mahomed Shah.

In any case, England had clearly everything to gain by preserving the independence of Herāt; and as to her rival's active interest in its downfall, the significant fact remains that, while England, in the person of McNeill, sped southward, Russia, in the person of Count Simonich, followed after. And with the appearance of both ambassadors in camp, the siege of Herāt changed its character. From a squabble of small significance, between Asiatic chiefs, it developed into the opening moves of that great international game of chess, which has gone on at intervals for more than a hundred years.

4

"PROPHESY now to us, O Pottinger Sahib! If the Russian Elchee be coming also, which will win the ear of the Shah-in-Shah?" Yar Mahomed brought down a heavy hand on the shoulder of his friend. "Tell us, now, what is the thought of your heart?"

But Pottinger shook his head. "I am no prophet. But this I know, that McNeill Sahib will exert all his power to preserve the independence of Herāt."

He spoke his thought honestly; yet not his whole thought. Assuredly McNeill would do all in his power to avert what seemed—in the fevered anxiety of the moment—a national calamity. But since his arri-

val, Pottinger had begun to doubt the extent of that power.

True he had little but guesswork to go upon. His attempts to communicate with Colonel Stoddart had failed time after time; and the appeal to Burnes had been crossed on the road by a letter from Kābul giving no promising account of the progress toward the alliance on which Burnes had set his heart. The obstacle, strangely enough, was not Dōst Mahomed Khan, but the Calcutta Government, whose attitude was no less disheartening to its own envoy than to the Afghan chief. But at the time of writing neither the Amir nor Burnes had quite given up hope.

As for the Wazir and the King, disappointment at his silence was tempered by the good news of McNeill's arrival in camp. But it seemed there were complications. Colonel Stoddart—with his injudicious freedom of speech—had made no secret of the reason for his senior's sudden move; and so put the Shah on his guard. Not until the 13th had he granted audience to the White Queen's Minister: and not till the 16th, after a second interview, did the Persian soldiers proclaim from their trenches that the British Minister, as mediator, would shortly enter Herāt.

It was now afternoon of the 18th; a day of unusual activity without the walls. Mediation might be in the air, but till peace was established Herāt should have no rest. Since early morning the Persian guns had been battering the ramparts behind the great mosque. Northward and eastward practicable breaches yawned; and that in the western wall had grown wider than ever. But the Afghans declared that their true defences were the ramparts and the two *fausses-braies*—upper and lower.

These were deep, half-covered trenches cut out of the thickness of the ramparts, reached from within by a hole through the city wall; and Persian attempts to seize those trenches had so far been vain.

It was near the latest breach that Yar Mahomed and Pottinger sat, with a group of Afghans, discussing the Russian Minister's approach. A Persian emissary had just confirmed the report, heightening its effect by inflated comparison between Russia, the all-powerful, and that arrogant slip of an island full of rich *bunnias* [1] in place of a soldier-log, so that only by paying much money to other governments could *izzat* be maintained.

With the two rivals-in-chief at their very gates this question of supremacy touched the Afghans very nearly; and Yar Mahomed—applauding Pottinger's assurance as regards McNeill—added shrewdly: "In this quarrel between mighty states, no doubt we must in time be trampled to death; and the English being more upright, we do well to abide by them. Is it not so, my friend?"

It amused him, trying to lure the British subaltern into a boasting match such as Afghans delight in. But Pottinger would not be so enticed.

"In my opinion, naturally!" he answered, smiling. "Everyone thinks best of his own country. But kingdoms, like men, must be judged by actions."

"Well spoken, Sahib," cried an Afghan officer with whom Pottinger had become friendly. "Let only the English lead the Afghans against all Asia—then it shall be seen! Till you frighten us, your Elchees can do nothing."

Pottinger laughed.

"But England has no wish to invade your country,"

[1] Merchants.

said he in all good faith, little guessing how soon she was to give his statement the lie.

Shouts from below and a fresh outburst of musketry put an end to talk. The Afghans sprang up, flourishing their weapons: and Pottinger sprang up also on to the banquette where they sat. Keeping within shelter, he had a glimpse through the parapet of a lively encounter going on below. For many minutes he stood so, quite unaware that he leaned against a loophole loosely blocked by a brick. Those on the banquette behind him were drinking tea and making rough jokes; and his friend, Deen Mahomed, called out to him to sit down and share the fun. But the scene below fascinated him, and he paid no heed until his friend laughingly forced him to his knees by tugging at his Afghan cloak.

He had not been seated three minutes when a bullet crashed through the very loophole he had leaned against, shattering the brick and knocking down the favourite eunuch of Yar Mahomed Khan. The man was carried out mortally hurt; and for some moments the Wazir looked after him. Then turning to the Englishman, he smiled grimly.

"Great is your *kismet*, O Friend of Princes! But that the hand of God wrought through the hand of Deen Mahomed, yourself had been carried out there. May God prolong your days! Small wonder that we have withstood the whole army of Irān, seeing that one so favoured of Allah fights within our walls."

Pottinger accepted the compliment at its worth, knowing well how the superstitious Afghan venerates him of good *kismet*, be he scoundrel or saint. At that moment a flying messenger broke up the warlike tea-party; and the two, who were never long away from the post of danger, hurried to the breach.

Next day brought the first welcome event in the deadly monotony of the siege. In the morning came Major Todd, in quest of Kamrān's formal consent to British mediation—the first European soldier in uniform to enter Herāt. Streets and roof-tops were thronged with starveling citizens, agape at the tight coat and overalls, cocked hat and epaulettes of that strangest of all strange beasts —the Feringhi in his habit as he lived. Courteous and pleasant-spoken, he found favour up at the citadel; and mediation being agreed upon, he rode back in high spirits to the Persian camp.

That same evening came a messenger reporting that the British Minister himself sought entrance to the city. The scattered assembly was called together again, while Yar Mahomed, with Pottinger and others, hurried to the south-west angle to welcome Sir John McNeill. A man with twenty years' experience of Persian politics, he was strongly of opinion that, for every reason, Mahomed Shah must be kept out of Herāt. Naturally, therefore, he was looked upon as a "Daniel come to judgment."

Half the night was spent in animated discussion; and not until the small hours did the two Englishmen repair to Pottinger's quarters for a brief spell of sleep. Already McNeill had perceived that Stoddart spoke truth when he said: "I am told Pottinger is in high esteem among the Afghans"; had seen, also, that, but for this fate-sent subaltern of Eastern aspect, Herāt would never have held out till now. For all his virility, the Afghan is only formidable when attacking. His rough-and-ready valour evaporates under the strain of fighting against odds; so the Herātis probably owed less to Pottinger's military skill than to his stubborn fortitude, his energy and power of resistance.

Sir John McNeill, emphasised his approbation by the

practical conclusion that he could not do better, in the interests of the city, than strengthen the hand of its gallant defender by appointing him British agent, with full authority to act as such.

So much for the "official wigging," and for dreams of further exploration! They had reached the Hakeem's house by now, and for some minutes Pottinger stood silent.

"Well? What's the obstacle?" Sir John asked kindly. "You accept, of course?"

But the younger man, flushing awkwardly, shook his head. "Believe me, your Excellency, I fully appreciate the compliment; and I am more than ready to go on doing my utmost, as a friendly British subject. But I have no wish to entangle myself with Central Asian politics, and I have already refused the same offer from Captain Burnes."

Sir John McNeill must have considered with some puzzlement this unusual specimen of a British officer.

"But you have plenty of capacity, my dear sir," he urged, still more kindly. "And this is not the sort of appointment that promising young men refuse out of hand. Think it over, and let me know before I leave."

But whatever Pottinger's inmost reasons may have been, his mind had long since been made up; and he was a difficult man to bend from his decision. By way of "thinking it over" he slept soundly till after six, when he woke to find his guest already up and busy writing.

At seven o'clock word was sent to Yar Mahomed that the Ambassador was ready to receive him. He came with all speed, and when Pottinger met him at the door he was still rubbing the sleep out of his eyes.

"Is it custom for your Ministers not to sleep at night?" he asked, genuinely amazed. "Scarce had I closed my eyes when I am told 'His Excellency awaits you'!

Who can wonder that your undertakings prosper and your *ikbāl* [1] is great when men of such high rank, far from the eye of their sovereign, work harder than any Afghan soldier, in presence of the Shah!"

Thus Yar Mahomed—arch-villain; yet, in McNeill's opinion, the "ablest man of his race and age." And, on this occasion, he spoke truth. That very quality of thoroughness, of duty-doing for duty's sake, has done more than force of arms or legislation to advance the lines of British dominion in the East, and to keep it paramount, often against overpowering odds.

Before McNeill went up to the citadel Pottinger repeated his decision; and the older man, thoughtfully regarding him, said no more. That afternoon the Ambassador left Herāt, carrying Kamrān's assurance that any reasonable terms, tendered through the British Minister, would be accepted; and not long after his departure a sealed note, addressed in his hand, was delivered at Pottinger's quarters. Half puzzled, half anxious, he broke the seal.

"In spite of your repeated refusal," he read, "I could not but do what seemed most urgently advisable before leaving Herāt. I therefore told Shah Kamrān and his Minister that you are now the accredited agent of the Government, and as such of H.M. the Queen. Whether you are averse to the advancement or merely diffident of your own capabilities, believe me, Mr. Pottinger, it is for the good of the service that you should accept the situation."

In the face of such plain speaking Pottinger could not but accede, and that cheerfully. For a man may be no self-seeker, and yet keenly appreciate so genuine a

[1] Prestige.

tribute to his capacity and zeal. Nor was this the last time that he was to be pushed, in his own despite, to the forefront of political service. If ever man had greatness thrust upon him, that man was Eldred Pottinger, the defender of Herāt.

At the moment he looked on the appointment as a temporary measure, since the day's events convinced them all that at last the siege was nearing an end.

But it was not so. The brunt of the struggle had yet to be endured. On the morning of Sir John's visit to Herāt, Count Simonich entered the Persian camp; and he did not let the grass grow under his feet. Two days later Major Todd brought word that the Asylum of the Universe had refused the proposed agreement, and repeated his ultimatum of two months earlier: "Either the whole people of Herāt shall make their submission, or I will take the fortress by force of arms."

It was Pottinger's uncongenial task to explain how Sir John himself had been deceived; and the Afghan king, though bitterly disappointed, declared that he had expected no less from the most faithless nation on earth. The joint reply, written by Yar Mahomed, showed the man at his best.

"Be not distressed. Now that we have suffered so many injuries and have been kept back from our tillage and cultivation . . . what have we to care for? If the Persians will not listen to your words, we must answer with our bodies, and leave the result to God."

5

But throughout April and May that resolute spirit grew increasingly hard to maintain. Too soon it became

evident that Russia's Ambassador had arrived at the critical moment. The unpaid troops were deserting in numbers. Supplies and ammunition were scarcer than ever, and the Shah himself had begun to lose heart: when lo! an unlooked-for saviour, from whose lips fell practical counsel, and from his hands golden encouragement. Months of deferred pay magically improved the temper of the army; and under Russian direction more effective batteries came swiftly into being.

In fine, Count Simonich took over charge and conducted the siege: a state of affairs as embarrassing as it was humiliating for Sir John McNeill. Yet, for a while, he held his ground, in the belief that his mere presence encouraged the Afghans: and, for a while, the Most Exalted enjoyed the importance of playing off one European Ambassador against another; while he noted, with satisfaction, how discontent and listlessness had vanished from his force like dew before the sun. Investment had become more stringent. Stray bodies of troops, scattered over the plain, had been drawn more closely round the walls; and, for the first time since their arrival, one competent brain controlled the movements of all. Russia's influence steadily increased, and that not only in the Persian camp.

Those within the city noted the changes also; but satisfaction was far from them. Harassed and disheartened by privations, by England's apparent inability to help, the Afghans began asking themselves: "Of what avail to multiply miseries, if it is written that defeat must come?" And, as April gave place to May, miseries multiplied increasingly; while Nature, with sublime disregard of death and disaster, decked herself for her great spring festival. For the time of tulips and thistles had come; and all the stony *dasht* of the foothills was

splashed with colour, starred with the first golden blossoms of the low-growing wild rose. Poplar leaves fluttered in the sun. But orchards, fields and vineyards—where were they? Never a tendril or a green blade pierced the battered earth. Only, here and there, a group of fruit trees, not yet cut down, blossomed bravely as if in defiance of the sacrificial knife.

Even within the city, wherever a tree or two was left standing, there were gleams of young green in ruined streets, against blackened woodwork; while the prevailing atmosphere of the charnel house grew more insupportable from day to day: thousands of mortals—living, dying and dead—cooped up in one square mile of space, with never a drain to mitigate the mingling of refuse with decaying masses of that which had once been man.

But a siege is not a garden-party: and increasing activity without kept Pottinger more constantly than ever with Yar Mahomed on the works.

The little that could be done in the city, his good friend the Hakeem was doing with a will. Wherever sickness or suffering could be alleviated, there he would surely be found. But the calamity no man could alleviate increased daily; too little food and too many useless mouths that craved it. Bullets might slay their fifties; fever, famine and scurvy now began to slay their hundreds. Grain grew scarcer, and horses replaced the lack of sheep—horses not paid for in money, but in superfluous human beings. Four or five of these would be given, readily, in exchange for one lean beast convertible into food for fighting men.

It was at this time that Pottinger first noted a change in the bearing of the chiefs, whom he met every evening in the Wazir's hall of audience; a forced note in their good-fellowship; an evident discomfiture under his direct look and tone.

No mistaking the significance of signs so unwelcome. And he was hardly surprised when one evening he arrived, at the usual hour, to find his supposed allies debating the immediate dispatch of an envoy to the Russian Ambassador, acknowledging Herāt's dependence on that power alone. It seemed that the King's European physician had been fostering the idea; for as Pottinger entered Hājee Ferōz was airing M. Euler's views on the question of the moment, his conviction that, if such a step were taken, the English would be powerless to interfere.

"*Shahbash!* Let an envoy be dispatched at dawn," was the general shout.—Then silence.

For there stood in the midst of them a boy of six-and-twenty, whose influence had gone from strength to strength; an influence based on their unbounded admiration for courage and a half-puzzled respect for the man who always spoke truth, at whatever disadvantage to himself.

The awkward silence lasted a second or two. Pottinger had not suffered so unpleasant a shock since the day when Yar Mahomed refused him leave to depart. But his words and bearing gave no hint of the fact.

Sternly, yet without heat, he rebuked them for a change of front unwarranted as yet; bade them at least await the result of their urgent appeal sent to the Governor-General direct.

"And how long would you have us wait, Pottinger Sahib?" demanded a chief of pugnacious character. "Seeing that while we wait our men are slain, our women and children die of pestilence and famine?"

"A hard case, Sirdar Sahib," Pottinger placably admitted. "But war is not child's play; and, having asked for help from India, give it time to arrive. Consider also that by acknowledging Russian protection you

sacrifice the independence of Herāt. Only have patience a little longer, seeing how difficult is the task in hand."

His quiet bearing and placable speech were not without effect: and after much long-winded argument they consented to wait. Pottinger, relieved for the moment, returned to his quarters. But the incident dismayed him so profoundly that he himself began to feel doubtful of the issue; doubtful how far he dared make promises in the name of his Government, accredited agent though he was. Yet by no other means could he hope to combat this new, insidious evil.

Night brought more of anxious thought than of sleep. Six months of hardship and incessant effort had told upon his health; and with the first spell of rainless summer heat, his old friend fever had returned to him. Lately his string bed had been moved up on to the open house roof; and for a long while he lay sleepless, wondering what the next few weeks would bring to pass. From below arose fitful voices and footsteps, cries of anguish and the noisome breath of open burial-pits. Leagues overhead, the sky was patterned with stars: and beyond these, again, this boy of early Victorian training and beliefs discerned the just, unsleeping governance of God.

In the strength of that belief, he thrust aside anxiety and doubt; slept sound; woke early; and hurried to his post upon the works.

The Wazir greeted him jovially; good news in his eyes. "How great was your wisdom, my friend, curbing the wild horses of impatience with the silken rein of wisdom! This morning I am told McNeill Sahib has assured the Most Exalted that if Herāt *should* fall into his hands it will be retaken by a British army. To-day, also, Major Todd Sahib hath been sent to make arrangements with the *Burra Lāt* for sustenance of our people

when the siege is at an end. Without doubt there is no power in Asia like the power of Great Britain ! "

So said they all, even they who had shouted loudest in favour of Russia the night before. Pottinger's brow cleared : and the word of hope sped through the city, rousing men to renewed activity and zeal.

The welcome reaction proved a flash in the pan. Britain's good intentions, it seemed, had been overstated and the rising mercury fell again to zero.

Throughout the next few days meetings were many and ineffectual. Long privation, and futile resistance, had unsteadied the balance even of the shrewdest. And as the wind blew east or west, so their bearing toward Pottinger veered between discourtesy and respect. But such was the impression made by his conduct of the siege that, whatever the quarter of the wind, he was always present as a matter of course. " Notwithstanding," he wrote in his journal, " that I might have been considered a doubtful friend, it was never contemplated that I should be kept out of their assemblies."

At times he would be listened to as one in authority ; at times rudely shouted down. In either case he met their shifting moods with an unchanging front. And in dealing with Asiatics, moral courage of this quality has a value all its own.

But the silence of Sir John McNeill grew daily more ominous ; the shifting winds of favour and disfavour harder to bear. On the 27th came a disheartening reply from Burnes ; and Pottinger boldly demanded a private audience of Yar Mahomed Khan.

Intimate speech between them had been rare of late ; and Pottinger felt uncertain how remonstrance *plus* ill-tidings would be received. The suavity of Yar

Mahomed's greeting signified nothing one way or the other.

"Good news at last, my friend?" he asked: and Pottinger regarded him steadily.

"No. Such news as I have is from Kābul——"

"Ah ha! Money? Troops?"

"Neither—as yet. But Captain Burnes has sent on your appeal, with strong recommendation, to the Governor-General."

Yar Mahomed pensively caressed his beard.

"Our need is urgent, and Calcutta is two thousand miles away: Teherān less than a thousand. *Will* troops or money be sent?"

Pottinger hesitated—and decided to take the risk.

"I think—only money," said he. "And I have little doubt it will be given to make good the loss of crops and revenue arising from our long defence. But," he added with emphasis, "such help would only be forthcoming upon certain conditions——"

"You have but to name them." The bold eyes gleamed at the prospect of treasure. "But for your services where would Herāt be now?"

Pottinger smiled, not ill pleased. "Very much where it is, no doubt! As to my conditions, they are two: Shah Kamrān must never submit to be called a servant of Persia; nor allow the interference of Russia in his concerns."

"You are moderate, my friend! You know how to draw the teeth of an enemy."

"I have not attended your assemblies this week with cotton-wool in mine ears. If the British Ambassador knew of your recent conduct, he would give no help at all.—You consent?"

"What else? Money we must have. Neither I nor

the Shah would yield our independence except under severest pressure."

So far, well enough—the money was forthcoming. Next day, the letter was dispatched ; and on the evening of the 29th came the long-desired note from Sir John McNeill.

Pottinger opened it eagerly ; then—for a long minute stood very still, as is the way of strong natures under a shock.

McNeill wrote that his relations with the Shah had become more strained than ever ; that his position bristled with difficulties of uncertain outcome. Urgently he bade his young assistant refrain from making any sort of promise in the name of Government. He himself had just received warning to that effect.

It was the Kābul policy over again. Friendship to be sustained on a lean diet of sympathy : and only the man on the spot knows how hopeless is the task. Clearly there was nothing for it but a frank confession that he had exceeded his instructions, that no certain help from India could be reckoned on. What the result to himself might be he could by no means foretell.

It was the time of evening assembly ; and Pottinger, pulling himself together, went straight to the Takt-i-pul.

His star had risen high in the past two days, and the chiefs gave him jovial greeting. He returned it with a courteous gesture. Then, deliberately, he made his way toward Yar Mahomed Khan. Ignoring a mute invitation to be seated, he spoke so that every man might hear :

" Wazir Sahib, I have that to say which is as unpleasant for myself as for you."

The Minister started ; and the buzz of talk dropped to a disconcerting stillness.

" Two days ago, in my great desire to give what

encouragement I could, I spoke with assurance of money for yourself and help for your people from the Indian Government. To-day I am advised by Sir John McNeill to make no promises that the Governor-General may not be able or willing to carry out."

For half a minute the stillness held. Then the storm broke in a fierce outburst of invective against himself, against McNeill and the entire British nation.

Among the more turbulent were cries of "Turn out the infidel!" "May God roast him and his!" "What further use is he now?"

The pugnacious chief, who had opposed Pottinger on the 23rd, caught up the last word.

"Use? Nay, he hath harmed us rather. Dissuading us, for his own ends, from a great alliance. But even now, brothers, it is not too late. The grey-coats are here; their friendship with the Shah increaseth daily."

For a few painful moments, Pottinger stood silent, while fresh schemes for a Russian alliance were discussed.

Then, turning to the Wazir, he again made his voice heard above the tumult.

"Wazir Sahib, tell me this. Am I to be insulted without a fair hearing, or shall I leave your assembly—*not* to return?"

The last made Yar Mahomed give pause. For he knew his man.

"Silence, brothers, silence!" he shouted, and was obeyed. "Shall we forget, in our bitterness of heart, that Pottinger Sahib hath fought with us, suffered with us and eaten our salt? Let him be heard."

Among Afghans an appeal to the claim of "salt" is irresistible.

"Speak on, Pottinger Sahib," said he. "Though I see not that much remains to be said."

"On my own behalf—this much," the other answered quietly. "That it is scant justice to treat a man as an enemy because he speaks truth. How much easier had it been for me to keep silence, leaving you all in a paradise of fools? Of my zeal for your interests you have proof; but I have no power to disobey the British Minister. And I can only offer to write once again, showing him your great disappointment. That may induce him to countenance my promise of help. Is it well spoken?"

"Manfully spoken." "*Shahbash*, Pottinger Sahib!" "It is English friendship we desire above all!"

The change of tone was manifest: and Pottinger, once more relieved, went with Yar Mahomed to his quarters. There, between them, they laid their desperate case before Sir John McNeill.

6

They were not kept long in suspense. Too soon came word that McNeill's influence in the Persian camp was at an end. Open disrespect shown to the British nation, in his person, would make departure imperative before many days were over.

Here was news to dismay the stoutest. To Pottinger, it was clear that the fate of Herāt now hung on his own exertions, his own power to uphold the wavering manhood of the Afghans even in the face of British retreat. The thing must be done: therefore it could be done. That was his simple rule of life. Happily, the bearer of McNeill's note brought news of an impending attack; news that would give the colour of cowardice to any talk of negotiations before the event. Afghan pride and bravado, though wearing thin, could still be galvanised

into a fair show of life. Independence, at any price, was the mood of the moment. The Persian dogs could never scale the ramparts or occupy the *fausse-braie*. Let them come on!

But for all their bravado, they watched, with secret misgivings, the British camp fall to pieces, tent by tent. The most ignorant knew the meaning of that unwelcome departure. England's alliance with Persia was at an end.

This was on June the 7th; and on the 13th came the first taste of renewed hostilities. A deserter from the city had basely made it known that, at midday, even the *fausse-braie* was neglected in favour of rest: and behold, half a dozen sleepy Afghans confronted with a Persian storming party in full force.

"Allah—Allah! *Wah-illa-ullāha-o!*" The name of God rang out from a score of throats; the crackle of devil's laughter from a score of muskets. But the sleepy half-dozen stood firm in the narrow traverses, till the clamour brought a relieving party to their aid. Thus reinforced, they sprang boldly over the parapets, and repulsed the Persians with heavy loss.

The effect of this slight incident was magical. In spite of British desertion, the *kismet* of the Afghans still held good; and the lively flame of hope leaped high. But it was a little flame and lean; and in the week of activity that followed, the besiegers showed a mind-directed energy absent hitherto. Breaches yawned wider, and worse than all, under the guidance of Russian officers, the dread mining operations were renewed with fatal persistence and skill. Despondency arose again, like a noxious miasma, stupefying will and courage. Even the stalwart bearing of Yar Mahomed Khan suffered a change that boded ill for the fate of Herāt.

There remained but one soldier among them whose courage was above proof.

In these days of threatened collapse, Eldred Pottinger exerted himself unsparingly ; and his recognised position strengthened his hand. That none thanked him goes without saying. Many abused him, rather, for having dissuaded them from alliance with Russia. Now they would be crushed beneath her heel. Useless to answer or argue. He could only work on ; patching up the battered defences ; animating, by his presence and example, the half-starved, ill-paid soldiers ; trusting that his chance might come to answer, with deeds, the thankless ones for whom he wrought. And presently it came.

The 22nd brought news of an impending assault on all five gates at once. If well planned and vigorously executed, Pottinger knew it could scarcely fail. The Afghans were too few and faint-hearted to hold four miles of wall against more than three times their number.

But no true soldier seriously anticipates defeat. By prompt preparations the garrison might yet be roused to make a resolute stand : that was his dominant thought. He discussed it with his friend Deen Mahomed while making his daily round of the works.

" Wise counsel, Sahib," the big Afghan agreed without enthusiasm. " Will it find favour with the Wazir ? Your Honour hath seen how, of late, he goes like one without hope. Yet the Sahib hath heart and courage enough for a whole regiment ! May his word prevail ! "

But on this most critical occasion it did not prevail. An apathy, almost incredible, seemed to have fallen upon the strong and resourceful Yar Mahomed Khan. Whether he foresaw defeat, and was at his old trick of safeguarding himself, the fact remains that neither advice

nor entreaty could move him ; nor any report convince him of danger at hand.

"In my belief, they come not," was his obstinate conclusion. "But if they come—it will be seen. The man who strives against *kismet* is a madman and a fool."

For all that, the madman and fool did what he could ; and thanks to his energy, the guards were ready at all points when day dawned on the 24th of June.

The Persians opened, as usual, with a fine display of fireworks. Then silence—a long silence ; while five distinct bodies of troops advanced, in order, to the five gateways of Herāt. Yet the Wazir still sat in his quarters, and the garrison followed his lead. Overpowered with heat and faint from semi-starvation, many of them had settled down to their midday sleep.

Suddenly silence and false security were shattered by a rocket overhead. Boom—boom—from the south. Boom, boom, from the west. North and east returned an answering challenge ; and from all sides at once came an angry crackle of musketry.

Doubt was no longer possible. The assault had begun.

Everywhere men sprang up in alarm, shook off drowsiness and seized their weapons. Yar Mahomed, roused at last, hurried out of his quarters to the nearest point of attack ; and Pottinger—all eagerness for action—found him by the Kandahar gate, whence the enemy had been repulsed, thundering out orders to the confused chiefs. But they, unready as the rest, were too slow for his new-born impatience and alarm.

"Come on, Pottinger Sahib," he cried at sight of his British ally. "While we halt, the Persians will be through the walls."

But now the truer soldier counselled delay. "Small

use, Wazir Sahib, to go lamely forward with a mere escort! A bold advance in force is our one chance."

Deaf to reason, Yar Mahomed and his handful of men straggled up towards the *fausse-braie* more like a party of curious idlers than soldiers eager to repel invasion. And Pottinger, cursing the change that had come upon the man, could but go with them, resolved to save the city, in spite of herself and her Wazir.

The struggle at the south-east angle had been fiercer by far than the rest. At every other point the Persians had been repulsed. But here the lower *fausse-braie* had been carried, its Afghan defenders falling at their posts to a man. The storming party, with yells of triumph, had clambered on up the slope—undeterred by irregular firing—till the higher trench was reached.

Another struggle here, more stubborn than the one below. But the Afghans were hopelessly outnumbered. No matter how many Persians might fall, others rushed like water into a vacuum. As well might straws resist the rising tide. They were up; they swarmed like ants over the parapets and through the narrow traverses. Checked by the shock of a gallant resistance, they flung themselves at last into the trench—and the upper *fausse-braie*, the Afghans' impregnable rock of defence, was gone.

Still no advent of reserves; no sign from the city of troops coming to their support. The foremost assailants, yelling like devils, had almost gained the breach itself, when at last there came answering yells from within; and the yawning gap was closed by Deen Mahomed with the Afghan reserve.

Shouts of triumph were checked by a storm of lead. Afghan knives flashed, achieving deathly work. The daring "forwards" were driven with slaughter out of the breach. But the *fausse-braie* overflowed with others

eager to take their place. Twice they swarmed up again, and twice were flung backward in confusion ; living, dying and dead. Yet a third time they returned, their number seemingly undiminished ; and at that Deen Mahomed's little band began to waver. Quietly, surreptitiously, those behind slipped away ; some openly deserting, some feigning a concern for the wounded, while the Persians pressed forward with hope renewed.

Then it was that Yar Mahomed and his straggling escort neared the gate of slaughter. They saw their men covertly retreating : heard the uproar swell louder : Persian yells of triumph telling their own tale. Almost the day seemed lost : almost—but not quite. Persia had one man to reckon with before she could set foot in Herāt.

For Eldred Pottinger sprang forward, checking the deserters with scathing speech ; shouting to the escort, "Close up, men, and come on. It's not yet too late."

But sights and sounds that fired the British subaltern seemed to paralyse the Afghan Sirdar. Instead of coming on, he hesitated, stood still, and finally sat down on a ruined wall, gloomily wagging his head.

Pottinger, amazed and indignant, swung round on his heel. "What ails you now, Wazir Sahib ? Bestir yourself and play the man, or all will be lost indeed."

"No use, my friend," the Wazir answered sullenly. "How shall a handful of half-starved men resist four times their number ? If Allah fighteth for the Persians who can hinder them ? "

"*I* can—if none else will ! " retorted Eldred Pottinger, his eyes blazing with scorn. "And you can also, if you shake off this devil of despondency. Go forward, even with these few, to hearten those who are retreating. Or at least send your son, and return to hasten the chiefs.

Shall it be written that Yar Mahomed Khan, through sheer cowardice, lost Herāt ? "

That ugly word stung the man to action.

" None hath ever called *me* coward, Pottinger Sahib, nor shall ! " he cried angrily ; and springing to his feet, he gave orders that his son return to hasten the chiefs, while he pushed on to encourage the garrison.

But the nearer they drew, the more desperate seemed the case. The Persians were pressing their advantage, though as yet they had not set foot within the breach.

" Smite, brothers, in the name of Allah ! Smite and slay ! " the Wazir shouted desperately.

But his voice lacked its normal ring of command : and the few who rallied half-heartedly were thrust back by those in front. At that Yar Mahomed's spurious energy flickered out. Instead of advancing, he stood still again, sullen and despondent as before.

" See for yourself, Pottinger Sahib. Without fresh aid they can do nothing. Through much privation they have not the hearts of mice in their great bodies."

" They have hearts ten times more manly than your own ! " Pottinger retorted, not staying to pick his words. " In that narrow gap, they only need determined support to hold their own against an army. If *you* turn back, they will follow like sheep—and who shall blame them ? "

But Yar Mahomed had turned already ; and Pottinger must keep pace with him to enforce his argument—justified by the prompt retreat of those who had rallied at their coming.

" Behold whether I speak truth," he cried : and halting, he turned on those who followed, forcibly driving them back. " Now then, Wazir Sahib, you see how it is. Will you not also return ? *You*—that should not follow, but lead ! "

Startled by the effect of his move, Yar Mahomed stood still. "Having returned," he asked lamely, "what remaineth to be done?"

As if in answer came the rush of hurrying feet from the city—a Sultan with fifty men.

"*This* much remains," Pottinger answered briskly. "Let the Sultan and his men gain the lower *fausse-braie*, push swiftly along and take the storming party in flank. We, at the same moment, will force our remnant here to make one more assault down the breach."

"Do as you will," the Afghan made answer; and waved a commanding hand to the new-comers. "Go at once and carry out the Sahib's instructions."

The Sultan turned to obey; but the Wazir sat on, looking after him, with a clouded brow.

At that Eldred Pottinger came near despair. What possessed the man he could not conceive. But the minutes were grains of gold; and shaking the Wazir by the shoulder as one shakes a sleeper, Pottinger cried desperately, "Sirdar Sahib, rouse yourself for God's sake and the honour of your country. Are you mad?"

Yar Mahomed, scowling, shook his head. "It is *you* that are mad. The plan is a good one, but we are too few. Allah hath strengthened the arm of the Persian; and no man can fight against God."

"*Bismillah!* Use not the sacred name to whitewash your despicable soul," the Irishman thundered; and losing his temper outright, he lashed the man's thick hide with an outburst of scathing Afghan abuse. A fresh onslaught at the breach drowned his voice: and, seizing Yar Mahomed by the wrist, he dragged the man to his feet.

"By God, you white-livered tyrant—you *shall* come on! Die if you must. But die like a man!"

Still grasping his amazed and thoroughly awakened ally, he rushed onward, shouting encouragement to those ahead and calling to those behind, who, with one accord, followed his impetuous lead.

Yar Mahomed caught fire at last. Wrenching himself free, he snatched up a heavy stick and rushed upon the hindmost, laying about him blindly with the full force of his arm. Laggards and deserters, cramped up in the narrow space, had no choice but to flee before him. Some in their terror overleapt the parapets and fled wildly down the outer slope, others were forced into the breach, Pottinger and Yar Mahomed following on their heels—not one moment too soon.

A great cry went up: "They come—they come! Herāt is saved!"

And, impelled from within, the whole body rushed violently forward, driving back the startled Persians as though an army were upon their heels.

At that same moment the Sultan's flank movement, along the lower trench, turned discomfiture to panic. Fresh troops came pouring into the breach. The assailants fled pell-mell, tumbling one over another in their eagerness to be gone; and Herāt was saved indeed—saved, under God, by the gallantry and spirit of a British subaltern.

7

Two weeks later, Eldred Pottinger sat alone in his private corner of the Hakeem's house: a mud box of a room, but entirely his own. And to realise the full virtue of those three words, a man needs to have spent months in the wayside mosques and *seráis* of Afghanistan, eating and sleeping with vermin-ridden Moslems, for whom soap

is superfluous, and a hair-brush unknown. Here, indeed, soap was past hoping for; and one solitary tin plate served him for all meals, that had grown scant and scantier as the summer wore on. But some measure of cleanliness he could manage to achieve, especially since the arrival of Allah Dad Khan, who served him stupidly yet faithfully throughout his long, eventful sojourn at Herāt.

One unglazed window looked upon an inner courtyard, white-hot with July sunshine. Furniture there was none save the chair he sat on and a rickety deal table, steadied by wads of paper.

On that table his belongings were neatly set out: hair-brushes, sextant, Bible, Elphinstone's *Kābul*, and the mottled native books in which he kept a daily account of the siege that was not, even now, at an end.

In this sacred hour of siesta the whole exhausted city lay inert as at midnight under the blaze of noon. Only flies and wasps, in their millions, were astir, teasing the sleepers and swarming over the dead; while a hot wind blew fitfully, filling the air with poisonous dust. Between flies and fever, Pottinger had given up trying to sleep. He sat at his table, bareheaded, in loose shirt and trousers, re-reading his unadorned entry for the 24th of June.

Seven months of privation, of imprisonment within one insanitary square mile of space, had scored new lines upon the strong, young face. The healthy red-brown of the skin was gone. Eye sockets and cheekbones showed too clearly; and the furrow between his brows deepened as he read. His entry was bald enough in all conscience. But the recurrent letter "I" jarred on his sense of modesty: a modesty so unusual that it would hardly be credited, if it were not proved by the actual page in his Journal.

When Sir John Kaye, twenty years later, compiled from it the history of the siege, he noticed that wherever Pottinger originally wrote "I," he had scratched it out and altered the wording, so that only curiosity—pardonable in the circumstances—enabled Sir John to extract the real history of his achievements on that memorable 24th of June. What men thought of them without the walls, and how swiftly the tale of them passed from lip to lip, had been proved within two days of the event: when a stranger from Karack—some thirty miles off—had prostrated himself before "the saviour of Herāt," kissing his hands and crying: "Praise be to Allah, who hath permitted me to make so great a pilgrimage!"

But fame, like all else, is bought with a price: and Pottinger soon saw that his reputation as a warrior had been gained at the expense of a popularity he could ill afford to lose.

By sheer dash and determination he had saved the city; but victory, achieved in the teeth of failure, wrought no exultation. Too well they all knew that by nothing short of a miracle could they withstand another assault of the same character. The Persians, though dispirited, had resources to make good their loss. The resources of Herāt were at an end. Citizens could not be fed. Soldiers could not be paid. The loss on both sides had been severe; and a week of inaction supervened. Even when the garrison set about repairing the damage done, it was clear that they lacked heart, as their leaders lacked spirit.

To preserve a resolute temper and balanced judgment in an atmosphere so befogged with gloom, was almost beyond human power: and Pottinger had deep-seated reasons for the anxieties that thronged his brain as he

sat revising his journal on that stifling July afternoon. Not merely were his own difficulties increased; but the torments of the people were pitiful beyond telling. Death from starvation was the least of their ills. Wherever money or jewels might conceivably exist, thither went the soldiers of Yar Mahomed Khan, leaving in their wake racked bodies, terror-stricken minds, and ruined homes.

To Pottinger's sensitive soul the horror of it all was sharpened by the knowledge that, but for him, the struggle would have been over two weeks ago. By his very impulse of heroism he was indirectly responsible for a reign of terror it sickened him to see. And the Herātis felt it also. Many reproached him openly; and the despairing looks of others reproached him more painfully still.

In the light of fuller knowledge it is easy to belittle the whole affair: to question the importance of the issues at stake. But Pottinger, imprisoned in a blockaded town, could not know that the whole affair had been inflated by statesmen and politicians, fearful of imminent invasion. He only knew that the fall of Herāt would be looked on as a grave disaster, a possible prelude to war. In the light of that knowledge he acted, and in that light his actions must be judged.

The very fact that McNeill had retired, discomfited, seemed to make a strong stand the more incumbent on himself: though at this time a sense of utter isolation shadowed his sanguine soul as never yet. For all practical purposes the world had shrunk to one plague-spot of disease and torment; its horizon the pickets of the Persian army; its supreme problem how to obtain money and food for thousands destitute of both. In three months no word had reached him from his own people, any of whom might be dead and buried; and

indeed, for all they knew, a like fate might have been his. As for Lord Auckland's answer to that appeal, writ in the beginning of things, it might be endlessly delayed in transit, if it had not long since been intercepted : a far more likely event.

" Sahib, is your Honour at leisure ? "

It was the voice of Allah Dad Khan, zealous to shield his master from unauthorised interruption.

At the Sahib's bidding he entered and announced the head of the Jews. These, no less than the Shiahs, had suffered cruelly at the hands of the Wazir. Only three days ago Pottinger had interfered to save their synagogue from being hacked down for fuel ; and now, behold his penalty ! But courtesy forbade dismissal : and the old Rabbi's honest emotion put self-consciousness to flight.

Without formal greeting he prostrated himself, and with trembling hands pressed a corner of the Christian's cloak to his lips.

Pottinger, deeply moved, raised him up and rebuked him in all gentleness, saying : " My friend, I am neither king nor deity that you should kneel to me. Enough for me that I was permitted to save the house of God from sacrilege. Be seated, till Allah Dad Khan brings tea."

The Rabbi obeyed, squatting on the shabby cushion where Pottinger had vainly courted sleep ; and the two were soon deep in talk upon the one eternal subject.

But even while the Afghan set before them *chupattis* and steaming bowls of a grey, tasteless liquid, came the sound of flying footsteps, and a gaunt ghost of a man flung himself into the room. Stumbling in his haste he fell forward, his arms clasped round a bundle hid beneath his draperies. Before Allah Dad Khan could remonstrate, he was up again and the bundle rolled with a clink to Pottinger's feet.

"Protector of the poor, forgive and save!" its owner entreated, skeleton hands set palm to palm. "Therein is this slave's remnant of ducats and of jewels. All else hath been wrested from me by the torments of hell. And when they return again"—a shudder convulsed him—"how shall I withstand them, weak as I am for lack of food? Only, into your Honour's house, they dare not intrude. Hide them, Sahib—oh, hide them! that when this handful of bones be flung with others into the pit, my house and my babes shall not be altogether at the mercy of the merciless. Your Honour will not refuse?"

For Pottinger's brow had grown stern with the progress of a too familiar tale. But if he doubted the wisdom, risk apart, of such constant connivance against authority, the man's last words must have swept it clean away.

"No, I do not refuse," he said quietly. "Your treasure will be safe in my keeping."

And the unnerved Herāti fell, in a sobbing heap, to the ground.

Then Eldred Pottinger, a great pity in his eyes, leaned down and touched that sobbing heap, urging it to take courage and play the man. Something in his tone seemed to light on a hidden spring. The Herāti struggled up unsteadily and executed a profound salaam.

"Let not the protector of the poor and saviour of the helpless altogether despise this slave. Naught hath passed my lips, save water, these three days; and too little food in the belly leaveth too little manhood in the heart. Moreover, last night . . . they came . . . to the house of my cousin, next mine own, and I heard all. An hour they strove with him, till life was wrenched from his body: and the death wail of his house continued till the morning. Then I, going forth, stumbled upon that which had been flung down on the threshold:

and I said in my heart, To-morrow at the dawn how shall it be with thee ? "

Grey as death, he swayed and would have fallen but for Pottinger's supporting arm. Gently forcing him on to the chair, he set before him his own untasted meal ; and without a word the Herāti fell upon the food like a starving animal. Only when tea and *chupattis* were gone, to the last drop and crumb, did an acute attack of shame set in. He—unmentionable scum of the earth—had eaten the food of the most noble ; food that was dearer than gold even in houses of the great ! And although Pottinger cut him short, he was not to be withheld from saluting the foot of his saviour.

Once he glanced at the precious bundle ; then he vanished—a pitiful unit among hundreds of his kind. Not until the Rabbi had also taken his leave did Allah Dad Khan's disapproving wrath break on his master's devoted head.

" God roast the whining coward ! " he cried hotly. " Why waste our last spoonful of tea and flour on a low-born, who already hath one foot in Hell ? Allah alone knows where I am to procure the morrow's supply. *Hazúr*, if this madness of giving be not checked——"

But Pottinger, silencing him with a gesture, held out the bowl and platter. " Better wash these," said he, not unkindly. " Later I go to the assembly, where no doubt tea will be served. Now—depart. I have need to be alone."

The Afghan obeyed ; and Pottinger, closing his journal —with its record of a seemingly futile achievement—sat a long while lost in thought, his aching head pressed between his hands.

The case of the hapless Herāti was but one of scores, more harrowing, more desperate, as he had too good

reason to know. Scarce a day had passed, of late, without bringing him fresh proof of the Wazir's inhuman methods of robbing Peter to pay Paul. Even ladies of rank had been threatened. None were safe, none sacred. And this human devil was the man with whom he, Eldred Pottinger, was constrained to work as a friend. To unite with him against the common enemy had been feasible enough. But now common humanity was forcing Pottinger into secret, often dangerous, conflict with his formidable ally. And what would be the end of it all?

8

An hour later Pottinger pulled himself together, combated the ache of emptiness, in Asiatic fashion, by tightening his *kummerbund*, and moistened his parched throat with a draught of lukewarm water. All hope of slaking thirst had been given up long ago. The nauseous fluid waked a mocking memory of iced brandy pegs and cool verandahs in luxurious days that seemed almost to belong to another life. Metaphorically he tightened also the belt about his heart, buckling it with the stoic counsel of Achilles: "Let our sorrows rest in our hearts; for there is no profit in lamentation." Then he went forth to the evening assembly of Yar Mahomed Khan.

There were times, as now, when he shrank from sight and touch of the man: yet, for the very people's sake, this travesty of friendship must be played out. To-day he hoped there might be no call to discuss matters intimate and confidential.

A vain hope: he knew it on the moment of arrival. There was purpose in Yar Mahomed's haste to welcome him; purpose in the compelling hand that urged him

toward an inner room, where cushions and steaming bowls of tea were set out for two.

"You are late, my friend," the Wazir remarked suavely. "Doubtless through oversleeping?"

"I slept not at all," Pottinger answered, adding, without proffered excuse: "There is fresh difficulty?"

"*Inshallah!* How shall there be an end of difficulty when one partner to the bargain is a Persian? Ill hap for us that your valour, beyond praise, hath roused anger unappeasable in the mind of Mahomed Shah. Letters come also from the Hāji, and from my brother, rebuking me for base desertion of Islam in favour of infidels. Shere Mahomed writes that until the envoy of the blasphemers—your honourable self!—hath been dismissed from the city, neither their Moojtehid nor the agent of Russia will come hither, to treat for terms of peace. And to-day—the Most Mighty hath sent word that Herāt shall be my portion if I will send Kamrān and yourself as prisoners to the Persian camp."

The man's air of distressful compulsion waked a gleam of amusement in Pottinger's eyes.

"An easy road to wealth and power," he stated quietly. "I cannot answer for the king. But for myself—there is no need of *sending*. Tell me your decision, and I go of my own accord."

Yar Mahomed lifted hands and brows in amazement that may have been genuine. "Great is the nobility of the Sahib. But how should I, who am Afghan, so disregard the claims of salt and of kingship? Moreover"—here came the true reason—"the promise is doubtless empty, as all promises of Irān."

"True enough. But what answer will you send?"

"I thought to call a consultation of chiefs——"

At this point came interruption in form of Yar Maho-

med's closest allies, the Topshi-Bāshi and Hāji Ferōz, Chief of the Eunuchs, eager for news; and Pottinger seized his chance of escape. He spent the rest of the evening in talk with his friend Deen Mahomed, who swore that the chiefs would oppose, to a man, the disgraceful demand of the Shah-in-Shah.

And it was so. The consultation resulted in a straightforward letter from the Wazir to the effect that "the Englishman is a stranger and a guest; and in the present state of affairs the Afghans could not think of turning him out of the city. If anything should happen to him it would be a lasting disgrace to the Afghan name."

Two days later Pottinger was bidden to the Wazir's quarters that he might hear the result. Yar Mahomed was not alone. The Topshi-Bāshi, Hāji Ferōz and other heads of departments were gathered in anxious conference, and it needed but the touch of awkwardness in their greeting to assure Pottinger that the stone of stumbling had not been removed.

"Well, Wazir Sahib," said he, without sign of perturbation, "I am to go, then, after all?"

"My friend, my friend! Do you account me a man altogether without heart?" Yar Mahomed italicising the protest by the warmth of his embrace. "Have not your exertions put the Afghans themselves to shame? And behold, your reputation as warrior is proven afresh by the importunity of Mahomed Shah; he being willing to conduct you, in safety, whithersoever you desire to go. These our envoys, astonished beyond measure, have returned saying they had believed Pottinger Sahib to be one man—with the heart of a lion: but this urgency of Irān for his departure proveth him equal to an army!"

A murmur of approval confirmed the extravagant compliment, which Eldred Pottinger mutely acknowledged.

"For the sake of Herāt," said he, "I would I were equal to an army. As it is, I see myself but a stumbling-block in the way of peaceful settlement. If your country or mine can be better served by my absence,—speak openly: and I will depart."

But there are limits even to Afghan ingratitude. Though Yar Mahomed would fain have dispensed with one whose presence put some slight check on his ways and wiles, he feared the lasting stain upon his public character. Moreover, Persia could not be trusted; and Herāt could not risk offending the British Government. Once more, therefore, diplomatic excuses were returned on the plea that Pottinger was a guest: and there an end of negotiation—for the moment.

By now it had become dismally clear that surrender was simply a matter of time. None the less was Pottinger's unchanging word of counsel: "A little longer—a little longer still," while his heart contracted at thought of all that such counsel implied. Not so Yar Mahomed. In the man's whole anatomy there seemed no nerve sensitive enough for shrinking; though doubtless had any compelled him to endure the brutalities he meted out to others, the missing organ might have come to light. As it was, rumours of a relieving force from Turkestan inclined him the more toward a waiting game: while Pottinger still hoped, with dogged persistence, for some promise of help from Lord Auckland that should put fresh heart into the besieged.

But their broken remnant of an army, active or idle, must be paid; their citizens fed: and Yar Mahomed, at his wits' end, called a fresh assembly of chiefs to consider the desperate question of ways and means.

It was believed that the Shah had a secret store of money, to which he would not confess; while many

suspected the Wazir of appropriating more than half the treasure he wrung from his victims. But since neither conviction could be turned to account, the Topshi-Bāshi advanced a proposal as practical as it was brutal.

Said he : " Since the Shah will not give what he hath, and none may force him, let me have leave to seize the person and property of whom I will—without hindrance from any chief in favour of his own ; and I agree to provide all army expenses for two months."

A unanimous shout greeted the drastic suggestion. A formal agreement was drawn up : and none except the Englishman—whose name was not on the bond—considered for a moment the renewal of brutalities involved. But having no counter-scheme in mind, it were futile to anger them all by raising vain objections. His popularity was a practical asset ; and the variable mercury of Afghan favour stood high at the moment ; as is shown by his comment under the same date : " They were, or appeared to be, well satisfied with me. The Wazir quoted my anxiety and efforts, as an example to those who had their women and children to defend."

Nor was it altogether fruitless, that same example of unfailing energy and courage. He himself noted with pleasure the determined bearing of the chiefs at this fresh crisis : " With open breaches, trembling soldiery and a disaffected populace they determined to stand to the last. How I wished to have the power of producing the money ! "

Throughout the next two weeks that wish became the most insistent cry of his heart. For the fiendishly simple programme of the Topshi-Bāshi resulted in pandemonium. Even the invertebrate Herāti clamoured for redress. An alarming increase of deaths from torture wrought inces-

sant appeals to an assembly paralysed by that written pledge not to interfere: till Pottinger, sick to the soul of horrors that money could check, resolved on an expedient bold as it was humane. He called on all who possessed money or treasure to contribute what they could for the defence of their city, on the strength of his bare promise that those who came forward should be repaid, at his recommendation, by the Government of India.

Whether a seemingly indifferent Government would repudiate or endorse his bold expedient, he could by no means tell. At worst he had a small store of capital in Ireland, and could rely on his great-hearted uncle for help in the fulfilment of a promise so given. The fact that his mere assurance sufficed for men born and nurtured in deceit, seemed to justify the Wazir's flattering assertion that the word of a British officer was as the word of God. On the strength of it, Pottinger had the satisfaction of checking cruelty past the show of speech —if only for a time.

But money came in slowly, and of relieving troops the passing days brought no sign: only, at last, came the long-delayed letter from Lord Auckland that should crown their refusal to surrender with promise of practical help. Judge, then, the effect of its sugared emptiness on men who had waited five months for its coming.

It was dated May 1st, and addressed to Shah Kamrān of Herāt.

"After Compliments,

"The confidence which your majesty has evinced towards me . . . has at once gratified and affected me," wrote his Lordship's secretary, surely not without a covert smile. "May God grant that, by this time, the cloud of trouble be lifted from upon you. But the difficulties of time and distance deprive me of the power

to do more than assure you of my sincere sympathy, and of the happiness it would afford me to hear of your being in undisturbed enjoyment of your sovereignty. . . . In conclusion I can only say that nothing would give me greater happiness, if opportunity should serve, than to afford you substantial proof of the great value I set upon your friendship and of my desire to render you essential service."

Unsatisfying diet this for men at grips with bare actuality. At the moment, they seemed to accept, without rancour, the complete collapse of their hopes. But next morning came a note bidding Pottinger to the Wazir's house, where he discovered a *levée* of chiefs in full progress. He was received with a coldness amounting to discourtesy : and no word was addressed to him while the meeting lasted. For all his rising anger, he sat on, till the signal was given for leave to depart. Then he rose and came forward.

" Wazir Sahib," he said, not concealing his wrath, " having come here at your express request I have a right to know why my presence was required ? "

Yar Mahomed, perceiving he had gone too far, smiled his most disarming smile. " At present, my friend, there be many difficulties——"

He would have edged past but for the detaining grasp upon his arm. " If there be difficulties, let these depart at once, that I may have speech of you in private and come at a clear understanding."

Tone and bearing showed plainly that Pottinger was in no mood to be trifled with : nor was Yar Mahomed in the mood for open breach with Great Britain.

The room was cleared ; and the two soon became engrossed in the one topic they could approach with any community of interest. Pottinger's temper could

rarely hold its own against the Asiatic's insinuating plausibility ; as he confessed in recording the interview.

" Yar Mahomed," he wrote, " is one of the most persuasive talkers I have met. It is scarcely possible to talk with him and retain anger. He is ready in a surprising degree . . . and one who thinks nothing of denying what he has asserted a few minutes before is a most puzzling person to argue with. Until you have thought over what has been said, you cannot understand the changeable colours that have passed before you."

And to-day the man had need of all his plausibility in justifying a return to the drastic methods his ally had so persistently denounced.

" Men will less readily trust that promise," he urged, " since the coming of your *Burra Lāt's* letter. And since money is life, I am left without choice."

" Wait, yet a little. That at least is possible," pleaded the more humane Englishman. " Help from Turkestan may be nearer than we know."

" Have we not already waited these three weeks ? And hath there come to our ears any word savouring of truth ? What, then, is left for us," persisted the plausible voice, " save surrender—which Allah forbid !—or money more plentiful than your generous promise can draw from a parcel of ungenerous chiefs ? I tell you, Pottinger Sahib, *all* have money. Yet will they not even advance it—much less give. Hāji Ferōz, arch-miser, could advance two lakhs, and Kamrān himself could supply ten. Yet neither has contributed one broken cowrie ! Thieves, misers all. When they behold their wives and daughters ravished by the Persians, maybe they will repent. But now it is as if one shouted into a well. Can you wonder, my friend, if I put pressure on the people ? "

For a moment Pottinger sat silent, repelled by the man's tale and by the implication of his own unlikeness to the rest. Then he asked quietly : " Is it quite impossible to put pressure on Shah Kamrān ? "

" By one means only, it is possible, Sahib. Though *I* know how much it would avail. We can appoint a committee of finance, making it clear to Kamrān, adding that either must he supply money for paying the army, or give leave that the committee shall seize it after their own fashion. Can you doubt his answer ? The miser will sacrifice his people."

The committee was convened. Without hesitation the miser sacrificed his people ; and the wail of the tortured broke, yet again, on unheeding ears. God, it seemed, had forgotten them ; and worse than vain was the help of man.

Yet, in that darkest hour, dawn was at hand.

Not many days after Kamrān's despicable decision came news, at last, that bore some semblance of fact. One who came from the Persian camp, asserted, on oath, that Colonel Stoddart Sahib had returned two weeks ago ; that a British navy had anchored in the Persian Gulf, and had landed at Bushire " a mighty army," now advancing on Shiraz. Colonel Stoddart Sahib brought word that his country intended war, unless the Most Illustrious departed without delay.

That the Most Illustrious had succumbed to that argument, was proved by the packing of cannon and mortars, the assembling of carriage-cattle and the destruction of the greater guns. Herāt's resolute refusal to surrender had allowed more than enough time for the awakening of Government : but miseries, over-long endured, robbed the news of all it might have effected months ago.

The chiefs were still incredulous: the people stunned to indifference: and Eldred Pottinger, dizzy with lack of food, sat alone in his quarters, asking himself over and over: "Can it be true—even partially true?"

9

For once the voice of Rumour had spoken approximate truth—though magnified in transit, like a snowball. As a matter of actual fact, two steamers and a few vessels of war had landed Bombay detachments and a marine battalion on the island of Karrak, with orders to be ready for any service which Sir John McNeill might think advisable. By that time Sir John was well on his way back to Teherān; but, as it happened, that surprising move coincided with instructions from the Foreign Office, empowering him to threaten immediate hostilities unless Persia withdrew from Afghanistan. So, true to his political conviction, he determined on one more effort to relieve Herāt.

Hence the reappearance in camp of Colonel Stoddart; and the Shah, disheartened by failure, startled by the report of advancing armaments, was ready enough to catch at any honourable pretext for retreat. Wherefore the British representative, formerly slighted, was received with all honour; and His Mightiness, after certain formal preliminaries, addressed himself, with leisurely dignity, to the uncongenial task of "climbing down."

Throughout the early days of September the stir in the camp was continuous; nor could the densest doubt its meaning. Danger from that quarter was over. The Herāt siege—one of the most memorable in Eastern history—was at an end.

In ten months, a population of some sixty thousand had been reduced to one-tenth ; and the support of even that insignificant remainder was beyond the resources of a province for the moment utterly destroyed. For in those ten months, the Persians had wrought such havoc and devastation as would scarce have resulted from fifty years of civil war. The beauty of that most fertile valley was clean gone : and the hapless city, satiate with the horrors of war, must now gird itself to endure the horrors of peace, of which we are apt to hear far less ; though it is by no means certain that they are not the more degrading, the more deeply corrosive to human life and character. It was against these that Pottinger set himself to contend with a spirit and vigour seemingly unimpaired by hardships already undergone. But the mass of labour thus thrown on his shoulders was too great for the strength of one man : and at Pottinger's request, Colonel Stoddart consented to join him on the departure of the Persian troops. He was under orders, at the time, to proceed upon a mission to Bokhara ; but, in the circumstances, he agreed to stay on till some measure of law and order should be restored.

So these two solitary Englishmen settled down to their new task, undaunted by pestilence, tyranny and famine ; while Persia's all-conquering army melted into the horizon ; and the siege of Herāt, no longer a painful exigency, became an item of Asiatic history, significant or insignificant, according to the historian's political profession of faith.

Needless to review in detail the conflicting statements of these last in regard to Russia's underlying mŏtive, or the vexed question whether the fall of Herāt would or would not have endangered the safety of India to the extent feared by men of proven ability, both in England and the East.

Perhaps, among them all, there are few opinions better worth considering than that of Sir Henry Rawlinson—himself an ex-Afghan political of sound judgment, insight and first-hand knowledge. In his view Russia's desire was less toward invasion than toward the estrangement of England and Persia, whereby she hoped to strengthen her moral influence in the East, while keeping India constantly anxious, constantly prepared for that which might never come to pass. On the showing of her own statesmen, her Herāt policy was of the order of Yar Mahomed: Heads I win; tails you lose. If Herāt had fallen, as was expected, Kābul and Kandahar would certainly have followed suit. Russo-Persian influence—pushed, thus, to the threshold of India—implied at best much internal agitation among native provinces and states; at worst "a difficult and expensive war to avert more serious dangers." If, on the other hand, England interfered to save Herāt, she was compromised, not merely with the court of Mahomed Shah, but with Persia as a nation. For "Russia had contrived to identify all Persia with the success or failure of the campaign."

The question of England's doubtful right to interfere at all has been amply discussed by historical authorities. The present record is mainly concerned with the fact that an unforeseen tangle of events conspired to keep Pottinger at Herāt in the hour of her danger; that, but for his presence, the Afghan heroes would have succumbed, or betrayed her to Persia, before three months were out; that, in effect, she owed her independence not to a few troops landed at Karrak, but to a brave and adventurous British subaltern, backed by the exertions of Sir John McNeill.

Now that the events of those stormy years are seen in clearer proportion, it is difficult to realise the effect

produced throughout India by the news that a subaltern of artillery in Herāt had overset all Mahomed Shah's calculations, broken up the ground under Dōst Mahomed's feet, and "made the political situation in western Asia better for England than it had been at the time of Burnes' mission."

By October the news had reached Simla. By November Lord Auckland was writing privately to Sir John Hobhouse: "I have appointed Lieut. Pottinger to be political agent at Herāt, and have given him praise in the *Gazette* and a salary of 1,000 Rs. a month, with a recommendation to the Court that it date from the commencement of the siege. I hope this will not be thought extravagant. His chivalrous adventure, his admirable conduct and their extraordinary results ought to be on record and upheld."

That *Gazette* was read with a glow of pride by Colonel Henry Pottinger, Captain Ward (Eldred's former commandant) and three brothers stationed in different parts of the country. Not a whit less gratifying than the appointment, was the tribute of praise that followed; and Lord Auckland's "marked satisfaction in bestowing the high applause due to the signal merits of Lieutenant Pottinger, who . . . under circumstances of peculiar danger and difficulty, has, by his fortitude, ability and judgment, honourably sustained the reputation and interests of his country."

From all sides congratulations flowed in, by letter and by word of mouth. But not till many weeks after the New Year had dawned did Eldred Pottinger himself awake to the knowledge that, in climbing the steeps of duty, he had stumbled unwittingly upon the summit of fame and become the hero of the hour.

BOOK III

SOLDIER-POLITICAL

I dreamed I was an husbandman, whom God sent into a dreary world. I toiled, breaking up the hard earth; but the more I worked the tougher looked my plot. I was tired; and when I saw that God watched me as I worked I said: "The toil is hard, but I shall see the fruit." God turned away, saying: "You shall not see the fruit." I cried aloud: "But there will be fruit, O Lord?" And God said: "For all your labour you get strength, not fruit." And I, complaining: "Lord, it were so much better to find wild flowers that might be trained to be more beautiful. But here are always thorns for me to eat." And God said: "If there were not thorns, I had here no need of such an husbandman as you."

So, from the sally, each obeys
  The unseen, almighty nod;
So, till the ending, all their ways
  Blind-folded, loth, have trod:
Nor knew their work at all, but were
  The tools of God.

R. L. S.

1

For Pottinger, the sustaining knowledge of appreciation and reward was still afar off: and throughout the intervening months many things were fated to be done and endured, not only by the two Englishmen and their famine-stricken remnant, but also by Lord Auckland's "Army of the Indus": one of the most long-suffering scapegoats of folly and iniquity, in high places, to be found in the annals of all time.

The events which led to its formation had been long a-brewing. They had begun, in effect, when Captain Alexander Burnes set out on his "commercial mission" to Kābul: and no presentment of the Afghan drama would be complete without a word of that significant prologue played out on the scene of ultimate disaster by Burnes and Dōst Mahomed Khan, known among his people as the *Amir-i-Kabir*. Faulty men both; but in this case shamelessly traduced, for the benefit of a Government graceless enough to evade responsibility by blackening their characters.

It is not to be denied that Burnes used commerce as a cloak for politics; that he was sanguine and credulous; a man of talent and ready wit, rather than of character and judgment; quick to catch the note of alarm that rang out from John Company's offices in Leadenhall Street and echoed through Central Asia. But—he believed in

Dōst Mahomed Khan, and proclaimed that faith from the first, in no uncertain terms.

As for the Amir, whose supremacy and friendliness were India's best asset, he was no whit less eager for the alliance. All he asked was the common give and take of a fair bargain.

Burnes himself wrote plainly to that effect:

> "Dōst Mahomed Khan has fallen in with all our views . . . has cut asunder his connection with Russia and Persia and refused to receive the ambassador from the Shah. His brothers in that city have, however, caressed the Persian Elchee all the more for this; and I have sent them such a Junius as I believe will astonish them."

This letter was never published; and the following extract from an account written to Macnaghten, a few weeks later, was also suppressed, when the whole garbled correspondence was utilised as a just pretext for an unjust war.

> "The present position of the British Government at this capital appears to me a most gratifying proof of the estimation in which it is held by the Afghan nation. Russia has come forward with substantial offers. Persia has been lavish in her promises; Bokhara and other states have not been backward. Yet in all that has passed . . . the Chief of Kābul declares that he prefers the sympathy and friendly offices of the British to all these offers—which certainly places his good sense in a light more than prominent."

Given these premises, the result seemed inevitable as a proposition of Euclid. But, while Euclid's problems depend on unvarying lines and angles, those of national politics hinge upon that eternally variable quantity—the human equation. The result, in this case, hung upon a Governor-General "cold, cautious and well-meaning, but infirm of purpose"; a triad of secretaries overbold, ambitious and scared out of their political wits by the presence of agents, other than British, within the sacred borders of Afghanistan; an Eminent Authority from Leadenhall Street breathing out wars and alarms; a Russian Ambassador paying the troops before Herāt That fatal conjunction brought visions of war to a peace-loving Viceroy, and sowed in the fertile brains of his secretaries the seeds of the Great Design.

Whose the initiative and whose the blame it were difficult, and perhaps ill-judged, to say. There were many ready enough to father that uncalled-for Army of the Indus while victory was its portion: none readier than the aforesaid secretaries, able and zealous men all; though, at that time, more zealous for the accomplishment of their own ambitions than for their country's prestige. Of these, William Macnaghten, secretary-in-chief, was doomed to overleap himself and fall on the other side. But in that spring of '39 his star was nearing its zenith. Gifted, scholarly and distinguished, a member of the Simla Cabinet, he had access to the private ear of a Governor-General separated from his Supreme Council, and afloat on a sea of political conjecture with no sound general principle for rudder.

Briefly, the position was this: India needed a reliable buffer between her and the supposed invader. Dōst Mahomed, powerful as he was, reigned over a house divided against itself. Two refractory brothers ruled at

Kandahar. A third, Sultan Mahomed, had ruled at Peshawar till it was wrested from the Afghans by their formidable Sikh neighbour, the Lion of Lahore.

It was the restoration of Peshawar—Kohinoor among Afghan cities—that Dōst Mahomed craved in return for his own practical proofs of friendship. But Burnes had "no power to treat of matters political," and substantial assistance was not in the bond. It was his to demand that the Amir should give up all equivocal intercourse with Persia, Russia, and all hope of regaining Peshawar; and to proffer in return expressions of Viceregal sympathy, empty as a blown egg-shell. For many months Dōst Mahomed had looked anxiously for the coming of his good friend "Sekunder Burnes": and here was the result!

Even the first day of meeting struck a note of disappointment. British liberality had become a tradition in the land; and Dōst Mahomed—like any Asiatic ruler—was childishly eager for those ceremonial gifts, whereby he might estimate the friendship of the giver. Jewelled swords, guns, robes of honour—these would surely be his in token of friendly alliance. But Burnes had been warned against extravagance, bidden to choose presents that "should exhibit the superiority of British manufacturers." Judge, then, the feelings of his host, when these were solemnly produced. For himself a telescope and a pistol; for his *zenana*, pins and needles, scissors and a few trumpery toys. It is said that "Dōst Mahomed exclaimed with a 'Pish!' as he threw them down, 'Behold! I have feasted this Feringhi to the extent of six thousand rupees, and have now a lot of pins and needles and sundry pretty toys to show for my folly!'"

In the Afghan's opinion such initial niggardliness boded ill for that which was to come. But he was already

acquainted with the goodwill and pliability of Burnes; and no doubt he hoped—even in the face of disappointment—to find the agent an apt instrument for carrying out his scheme of a consolidated Afghanistan, strengthened by a friendly alliance with Great Britain.

The notable contrast between the two men went far to justify such a hope. The Dōst—handsome, manly, with the aquiline features of the finer Afghan types—looked every inch the iron-handed ruler and shrewd, vigorous individual that he was. Burnes, on the other hand, lacked presence, dignity and reserve. His round eyes, furtive and restless, showed intelligence without real penetration or power; nor were they redeemed by the drooping nose and the pleasure-loving mouth adorned with a dapper moustache sharply twisted at the tips.

Travelled, accomplished, and a lively talker, he might well have attained popularity among the Afghans, but that zeal outran discretion and led him into extremes neither admirable nor discreet. Wisely adopting Mahomedan dress, he unwisely adopted Mahomedan habits of life; including the harem. Still more unwisely, he thought to ingratiate himself with orthodox Moslems by making light of religious differences and of religion in general: a mistake for which he paid heavily in the stormy days that were to come. Even at this date his lack of dignity and of diplomatic caution seems to have alienated the respect of the chiefs; and it too soon became clear that a "commercial agent" could neither commit himself nor compromise his Government. But he could and did write for further instructions, enlarging on the friendliness of the Amir.

Meantime, came warlike news from Herāt, sufficiently alarming to Burnes' excitable temper.

"Herāt has been besieged fifty days," he wrote to a friend, "and if the Persians move on Kandahar I am off there with the Amir and his forces, and mean to pay the piper myself! . . . I am on stirring ground: and am up to it in health and all that. I was never more braced in my life."

He was in high spirits at this time; undismayed even by the appearance of a Russian agent in December. And in truth the man's reception only set Dōst Mahomed's sincerity in a clearer light.

Burnes' own unofficial account of the event is spirited enough, and very characteristic.

"We are in a mess here! Herāt is besieged and may fall; and the Emperor of Russia has sent an envoy to Kābul offering Dōst Mahomed money to fight Ranjit Singh!!!!! I could not believe my ears or eyes; but Captain Vickovitch arrived with a blazing imperial letter three feet long, and came immediately to pay his respects to myself. I, of course, received him and asked him to dinner. This is not the best of it. The Amir came over to me, sharp, and offered to do as I liked; kick him out or anything. And since he was so friendly to us, I said, give me the letters the agent has brought, all of which he surrendered sharp; and I sent an express to my Lord A., with a confidential letter to himself . . . telling him that after this I knew not what might happen. And it was now a neck and neck race between Russia and us."

Whether Vickovitch was in truth an accredited Government agent, Russia's tyrannic methods make it hard to

say. Though he was actually sent by the Government of Orenberg, when England remonstrated, Russia knew nothing at all of one Vickovitch. But Vickovitch knew Russia. Perceiving that he was to be the scapegoat, he wrote a few bitter lines, burnt all his other papers, and blew out his brains.

But whether Vickovitch was genuine or no, Burnes was, at that time, genuinely convinced of India's imminent danger from Russian designs. And while he awaited encouragement from on high, conferences multiplied at the Bala Hissar; blown egg-shells being cheap, and the Amir, as yet, unaware of their emptiness.

Burnes, helpless and impatient, could do no more than report the conferences at full length, and record his own opinion that the Amir "is simply pursuing the worldly maxim of securing himself from injury"; that "his arguments seem deserving of every consideration"; and, finally, that "his interests are bound up in an alliance with the British Government, which he will never desert as long as there is a chance of securing it."

Shameful to remember that neither these, nor any other letters favourable to the Amir, were published as they stood till twenty years later; that, through despatches deliberately mutilated, the characters of Burnes and of Dōst Mahomed were so effectually lied away, that both appear to have done what they ought not to have done and the reverse. "Official documents," it has been truly said, "are the sheet-anchors of historians. . . . If these are tampered with—the grave of truth is dug: and there is seldom a resurrection." Or else—as in this case—it comes too late.

But in January, 1839, Burnes still pleaded; Dōst Mahomed still hoped against hope.

Not for much longer: February brought discourage-

ment for Burnes, in the shape of a letter from Macnaghten, that ran to twenty-four paragraphs, of which twenty-one were suppressed. It was "with great pain," wrote Macnaghten, that his Lordship approached the subject of "entirely unauthorised" promises held out by Burnes to the chiefs of Kandahar. He only refrained from directly disavowing them lest it weaken the influence of the already paralysed Burnes, who was enjoined, for the future, to conform punctually to orders issued for his guidance. If he had been hampered formerly, behold him now effectually chained to a policy he had good reason to disapprove.

In justice to Lord Auckland—who depended entirely on others for information—it should be remembered that the despatches of Burnes passed through the hands of Captain Wade, British agent in the Punjab, as hot a partisan of Afghanistan's ex-King, Shah Shujah, as Burnes of Dōst Mahomed Khan. Thus the Kābul letters, before reaching Simla, were often invalidated by plausible arguments and bold assertions, which Burnes had no chance either to see or to refute. Wade urged, before all things, the importance of conciliating Ranjit Singh in respect of Peshawar and of Afghan sovereignty. It was in this connection that he first actively pressed the legitimate claim of Shah Shujah, who would demand no new concessions from the Sikhs. In fine, it was a question of expediency versus principle: an unequal battle at best.

More: the suggestion arrived at a time when the Home Government had already echoed McNeill's alarms. Burnes himself had exaggerated the import of the Vickovitch "mission"; and there seemed small hope of a friendly arrangement between Dōst Mahomed and Ranjit Singh. All things conspired to drive a harassed Governor-General

along the line of least resistance: and before the end of February, hope had been extinguished in the hearts of Burnes and the Amir. His Lordship, it seemed, had no intention of complying with the latter's proposals. Peshawar belonged to the Sikhs. Theirs it must remain.

"Then, and not till then, a change came over the conduct of Dōst Mahomed Khan." Not till then did the star of Burnes begin to set; the star of Vickovitch to arise. He himself has left it on record that from December to the 20th of February he had been no more than two or three times in the presence of the Amir, who daily conversed with Burnes. If, after the 20th, matters took another turn, who shall blame the chief?

But, even so, the end was not yet.

During the first week of March honest efforts to effect a compromise were made by the Nawab Jubbar Khan, a noted friend of the English.

On the 21st Dōst Mahomed himself dispatched a final appeal, couched in language approaching humility. He, the Amir-i-Kabir—whose fulsome greeting to Lord Auckland was fresh in the memory of both—now begged only two words of encouragement. "Let his Lordship recognise me as Amir of Kābul," was his plea, "and I will forget the mortal feud between me and Shah Kamrān, my enemy by blood. I will rush to his support with my best troops—on the simple condition of receiving a subsidy for troops I shall employ in the Company's service." For the present he would not say another word about the restoration of Peshawar. Unpalatable language for the chief of an arrogant race. But it availed him nothing. Because he would not fling himself, unconditionally, into an embrace that offered no protection, he was written down a "hostile chief, harbouring schemes of aggrandisement injurious to the security and peace of the frontiers

of India." And at that time British India's most northerly stations were Ludhiana and Ferōzepore!

Before the middle of April Burnes knew that all was over. He had done his utmost—and failed. Indiscreet often, and lacking in dignity, he would, in this case, if left unhampered, have secured the allegiance of both Kābul and Kandahar. Unhappily, as has been seen, his opinions were constantly neutralised by Wade's partisan arguments. As the star of Shah Shujah waxed, the star of Dōst Mahomed waned. Decreed—in spite of contrary proof—to be a hostile chief, it is not surprising that Lord Auckland's policy soon made him one.

On the 26th of April—when all the valleys were musical with snow-fed streams and the city had donned her spring *sári*—Alexander Burnes rode out of Kābul. And with his departure, the curtain fell on the prologue of that tragic drama: a drama of injustice and indecision, of blood and terror, that culminated in the first serious reverse to British arms since Clive laid the foundation stone of Empire, eighty years before.

2

When Burnes at last reached Simla, he was greeted by Macnaghten's fellow secretaries with an urgent request that he would "say nothing to unsettle his Lordship." It seemed they had had "all the trouble on earth to get him into the business; and even now he would be glad of any pretext to retire." But already the baffled champion of Barakzai supremacy had dispatched his final protest in the shape of a long letter to Macnaghten, that concluded with a paragraph worth recording: "It still remains to be re-considered *why* we cannot act with Dōst Mahomed

Khan. He is a man of undoubted ability, and has, at heart, a high opinion of the British nation: and if half you must do for others were done for him he would abandon Persia and Russia to-morrow. . . . At best he had a choice of difficulties, and it should not be forgotten that *we* promised nothing, while Russia and Persia offered a good deal."

It was not forgotten. It was suppressed.

A very few days in Simla convinced Burnes that crude theories and inflated ambition were destined to override all obstacles, not excluding the dictates of justice and national honour. He was quick, also, to perceive that the golden key to promotion and preferment was enthusiasm for the royal exile: and, being no Quixote, but a man eager for place and power, he turned his back thenceforward on the lost cause of Dōst Mahomed Khan.

Macnaghten, at that time, was still away in Lahore, at the Court of Ranjit Singh remodelling a former treaty, whereby it was now agreed that the Maharajah and the British Government should heartily co-operate in the thankless task of restoring Shah Shujah, the Undesired, to the throne of his very few ancestors. British co-operation was to take the form of providing officers for troops levied by the Shah, and establishing an agent at Kābul. British bayonets were not to figure in the final tableau. On this point the Shah laid explicit emphasis, and all was amicably arranged.

Impossible, at this distance of time, to discover who first touched the spring that set all these fatal activities in motion.

According to Kaye, the earliest despatches of the period almost suggest a "competition between London and Simla for the discredit of initiating the ill-starred project": and as for the complications that ensued, the most omni-

scient could scarcely venture a clear indictment; so complex were the influences and motives involved; so malign were the ironies of circumstance. Wherever the wrong choice or the wrong decision could be made, so surely it was made, with dismal iteration. Wherever the situation demanded cool judgment or delay, there did hot-headed impulse rush blindly in. Wherever the need of the hour was for prompt and vigorous action, so surely was it paralysed by discussion and delay. Some half a dozen names at least stand out with unenviable distinctness; and perhaps among them all was none more eager, more blindly optimistic than William Macnaghten, brave gentleman and brilliant scholar; but unstable of judgment, and more experienced in irresponsible office than in direct dealings with men.

And what of the harassed Governor-General? The man who, three years earlier, had met Dōst Mahomed's appeal for help with the reminder that it was not the habit of his Government "to interfere with the affairs of other independent states"; the "safe man" chosen by the Whigs to oust an already-appointed nobleman of high character—what of him?

Between mutilated letters and suppressed despatches his actual share in the project will never rightly be known; but that he assumed the full responsibility his own letters to the Indian House give proof. On May the 22nd he sent home word of the failure at Kābul and the probability of war. In August followed a detailed account of his policy, capped by the amazing conclusion that "of the justice of the course about to be pursued, there cannot exist a reasonable doubt."

On September the 9th Mahomed Shah had turned his back upon Herāt. On the 13th an order was issued for the assembling of an army that numbered, eventually,

twenty-five thousand men, with Sir Henry Fane in supreme command. Already, from cantonment to cantonment, a whisper of war had been carried by Rumour; and now at every mess-table and race-meeting, and wherever Anglo-Indians met together, one topic was in the mouths of men, one fear knocking at the hearts of women. Since the capture of Bhurtpore, in 1827, there had been no such stir and preparation in the land; but to the credit of the officers be it said, that, for all their eagerness to explore an unknown country, there was scarce one among them who did not wish he were to draw sword in more honest cause.

So much for the army. But the Great Design was a political affair; demanding a civil agent, "to direct the mind of the Shah" and the general outline of the campaign.

The king's son, with fifteen thousand Sikhs, was to march up through the Punjab *via* Peshawar. But the shrewd old Lion of Lahore did not relish the idea of his allies marching a full-fledged army through his dominions. So the larger force, with Shah Shujah, must enter Afghanistan by the Indus route *via* Quetta and Kandahar. The shepherding of the Punjab force fell naturally to Captain Wade, translated into Lieut.-Colonel for the sake of prestige. The choice of an envoy, to accompany the Royal Pretender, was a matter of far greater moment.

That Burnes regarded the post as virtually his own is proved by a letter written from Simla in July: "We are now planning a grand campaign. . . . What exact part *I* am to play I know not; but if . . . hourly consultation be any pledge, I am to be chief. I can tell them plainly it is *aut Cæsar aut nullus*." But Lord Auckland, not without cause, mistrusted the discretion of this curiously

volatile Scot; and August found "Cæsar" ruefully preparing to "take a lower room."

"I believe the chief and Macnaghten will be made a commission; Wade and myself political agents under them," he wrote to a friend. "I plainly told Lord Auckland this does not please; . . . But what can I do when he tells me I am a man he cannot spare?" Clearly his disappointment was keen and his vanity rubbed the wrong way: though he consoled himself with reflection that it were preferable Dōst Mahomed should be ousted by another hand than his own.

Macnaghten, it appears, had proposed himself; and his claim to carry out his own cherished policy can scarce be denied; though unbiased observers felt certain that the choice would fall on Colonel Henry Pottinger. His clear head, uncompromising character and knowledge of the country stamped him as pre-eminently the man for so responsible a post. Unluckily Lord Auckland had no intimate knowledge of Pottinger, and their opinions had a tendency to clash; moreover, the man who frankly sets principle before expedient very rarely basks in official favour. England's guardian angel must have been asleep or on a journey in those days. For William Macnaghten was duly gazetted "Envoy and Minister on the part of the Government of India at the Court of Shah Shujah-ul-Mulk," while Burnes figured in the same document as "Envoy of the Chief of Kelāt and other states"—under Macnaghten's directions; a bitter pill this last.

Impossible to avoid the thought that, had Henry Pottinger been given his due, England might have been spared that discreditable chapter of history commonly known as "the Afghanistan blunder." For William Macnaghten knew little of men, less of Asiatic intrigue, and nothing of Afghanistan or its people. Worse than all, he was a man

of books—not a man of action. His tragic failure is but one outstanding proof, among scores that the examination paper is not the true test of fitness for any service demanding, before all things, character, sense of responsibility and capacity for action.

In that very summer of '38 India boasted four Lawrences, three Conollys, three Broadfoots and half a dozen Pottingers, to say nothing of other remarkable family groups, many among whom would have been ignominiously "spun" by the Civil Service Commissioners. Clive himself would have shared the same fate. Yet the amiable and accomplished Macnaghten, winner of countless University prizes, went near to wrecking the Empire founded by that born leader of men.

But none had leisure to doubt the issue when every cantonment was astir with preparation for the grand military promenade at the frontier station of Ferōzepore; when Lord Auckland was engaged in drafting the notorious Simla manifesto, wherein (as has been said), "the views and conduct of Dōst Mahomed Khan were misrepresented with a hardihood which a Russian statesman might have envied; and the words justice and necessity, the terms frontier and . . . national defence applied in a manner for which there is fortunately no precedent in the English language."

For the credit of the British Rāj it may be added that Lord Auckland's fashion of applying them still stands alone.

By early November all India knew that at least one object of the expedition had been attained, its one doubtful justification swept clean away. But so assiduously had the poison of prejudice and of Russophobia been instilled into Lord Auckland's mind, that he believed himself bound to persevere with an expedition unani-

mously denounced by India's oldest and wisest politicians: Wellesley, Metcalfe, and Mountstuart Elphinstone, not to mention the Court of Directors and the Great Duke himself.

3

"Do you believe His Puppetship has the smallest intention of issuing that fiat against promiscuous tyranny? And if he did—do you believe our Asiatic Napoleon would obey?"

The speaker was Charles Stoddart. Restlessly pacing their mud-walled living room in Pottinger's quarters, he paused and flung the question at his companion.

Pottinger, seated at the writing-table, looked up with a rueful smile. "No," said he quietly. "I have lived more than a year in Herāt. And I believe neither."

"Then we must insist, and re-insist, *ad infinitum*?"

"Yes—what else? Unless we steadily set our faces against tyranny, injustice and slavery, our presence here would be worse than a farce."

Stoddart acquiesced in silence. The broken lines of an irascible temper deepened between his brows.

"Damn that plausible scoundrel!" was his next contribution to the discussion. "Insisting, on principle, is all very fine. But the question remains—*can* we hope to establish any semblance of law and order in this pestilential hole, except over the corpse of our noble ally—Yar Mahomed Khan?"

"Frankly—I think not."

"Wish to God I could shoot the devil out of hand!"

At that Pottinger smiled strangely. "Not you, my dear fellow. That privilege would be mine! I've been

tempted to take it a score of times. But, after all, raging against the man is sheer waste of energy. As for the outcome—these people have a good saying: 'The work is with us; the event is with Allah.' Now, if you let me be for ten minutes, I can finish this letter to Government. We are overdue at the Citadel."

Colonel Stoddart glanced amusedly at the thin, closely-written sheet. "I don't envy you, attempting to put the tale of our doings coherently on to paper! But I'll cease from hindering you. When you're ready, let me know."

Left alone, Pottinger passed a hand across his eyes; for he was weary in body and spirit. Then once more he took up his pen—at all times an unready weapon to this man, who could only reveal himself clearly in action. But whatever he was called upon to do, he did with his might. His letters to Government during that disheartening year are marvels of copious, if somewhat chaotic, information: and Calcutta secretaries, unable to read between the lines, may be excused if his involved phrases and hazy punctuation gave them a misleading idea of the writer and of the work he was so zealously striving to do; work stultified at every turn by the one man who could ensure the success of their attempt to rebuild the shattered city out of its own ashes. For all that, he could look back on five weeks of effort not altogether barren of result.

On the day that Colonel Stoddart joined him, they had sent criers round the city—at Kamrān's request—announcing that Herāt was now under British protection; that, for one year, the ruined citizens should be free from taxation; that seed and corn would be provided for the barren fields; shopkeepers and cultivators encouraged to start afresh by grants of money repayable in three years. The loss of revenue to Kamrān was to be balanced by a

loan from the British Government, also repayable in three years.

So far well enough. Yar Mahomed had no quarrel with British beneficence that put good rupees into the public coffers, and checked the flight of despairing Herātis. But when he found himself expected to refrain from extortion, slave-dealing and terrorism, he began to take counsel with his heart as to whether these smooth-tongued unbelievers might not achieve an influence too powerful to suit his own schemes of self-aggrandisement. From the day when he decided that it was so, the situation resolved itself into a prolonged duel—now covert, now manifest—with Pottinger and himself for principals, and for seconds, Colonel Stoddart and Shah Kamrān.

Thus: Pottinger protested, on behalf of his Government, and straightway set up a primitive court of appeal at the Pae-i-Takht: literally The Foot of the Throne, actually a public place of justice—or the reverse. Here he announced, before the assembled chiefs and people, that as representative of the British Government, he guaranteed the maintenance of justice and the abolition of slavery throughout the province of Herāt. Here he came daily, with Colonel Stoddart and a friendly Mullah, whose holiness gave greater weight to the proceedings: and even so inadequate a check on violence and crime had a moral effect. The people who thronged in gratitude to Pottinger's house, departed with renewed assurance that the British Government would uphold justice in the land.

When these words reached the ears of Yar Mahomed Khan, he resolved the more firmly that a Government thus minded should never become paramount in Herāt. So long as money flowed in plenty, just so long would he suffer the intrusion of these officers. Then—*pfah!* he

would spue them out of his mouth as a man spues out the stone of a peach when juice and flesh are gone.

So he bided his next excuse for reasserting his pre-eminence. Nor was an occasion far to seek. The licence and rapine of his own soldiery soon drove Pottinger to proclaim that the British Government—after rewarding all who had served through the siege—would recognise no troops but those of the Shah, in whose service all volunteers could be enrolled. By arrangement with his good friends the Hindu merchants, he had redeemed the Crown jewels and secured an advance of money sufficient to relieve the most distressful cases, to revive, in a measure, the fallen status of the king's household.

On hearing these things, the Wazir's faction argued that Sahibs who redeemed jewels, paid the king's servants and gave children's food to the dogs, must possess treasure in plenty : and since none came their way, they determined to help themselves. Hence renewed outbursts of violence, and a public declaration by Yar Mahomed of an immediate return to his old tyrannic methods of shepherding the people of Herāt.

It was this last that had impelled the two officers to draw from Shah Kamrān the promise of a counter-declaration to be issued by his Chief of Eunuchs, Hāji Ferōz Khan. That it was not accomplished, nor like to be, they discovered speedily enough.

Arrived at the Citadel, they were met in the bare, unimposing Hall of Audience, by those kindred spirits of evil, Hāji Ferōz and Yar Mahomed Khan, the last attended by a crowd of armed retainers, without whom he never set foot outside his own door. He greeted his allies with studied coldness. But the eunuch—preferring the pose of peacemaker—fervently besought his friends to purge

their hearts once for all of a distrust so unnatural between those who had worked together hard and long.

"The Wazir Sahib and I," he concluded, with an ingratiating gesture, "are of one mind in this matter. Is it not so, my friend?"

Yar Mahomed displayed his unsightly teeth without changing the expression of his eyes.

"The Hāji speaks truth, as always. Do *I* not grieve at the plight of my people? Yet troops demand payment. Retainers must be clothed and fed. Give me a written promise from your Government to pay five lakhs of rupees" (£50,000) "in compensation for loss of one year's revenue, and I will abolish every tax and duty as you desire."

Pottinger suppressed a smile at the barefaced demand of one year's revenue multiplied by five. "I have said that my Government is willing to make good your loss," he answered, emphasising the last words, "provided you forgo all taxes and publicly annul your declaration that tyranny will be your weapon."

"*Inshallah.* That is a fair bargain, as between friends. So long as I can get money elsewhere—so long the people shall rest in peace."

On that assurance Pottinger departed; marvelling how long this sudden access of virtue would endure.

He was not left many hours in doubt.

No orders were given to the officers of justice. The paper drawn up by him and sent to Hāji Ferōz was not returned with the Minister's signature. Instead came the news that taxes were being levied by Shere Mahomed, armed with the King's *firman*, and that the Wazir had suddenly withdrawn his own contribution to the city police, thereby reducing a force, already insignificant, to the paltry number of twenty-five men. Pottinger, sick

of vain remonstrance and anxious to avoid needless friction, said no word.

Two days later a provision *Khafila*—reassured by promises of good treatment—ventured into Herāt, and was so flagrantly mulcted at the gate, that its owners thronged to the British agent's quarters overwhelming him with reproach.

"A fine lot of use tweaking the devil's tail, when we can't cut his claws!" cried Stoddart, the irascible. "Send for him and confront him with these fellows——"

A familiar voice sounded without.

"Talk of the devil!" said Pottinger—and Yar Mahomed entered on the words.

"This is shameful conduct, Wazir Sahib——" Pottinger began, and was promptly interrupted.

"Shameful, indeed, my friend, that such things be done without authority, blackening my good name."

At that Pottinger caressed his beard, and Stoddart, muttering inarticulate curses, swung out of the room.

Yar Mahomed glanced after him, the glint of steel in his eyes. The arrogant temper of the Englishman waked his worst passions and galled him at every turn; but he knew the value of biding his time. Without comment, he gave peremptory orders that men be sent to recover all imposts levied on the *Khafila*.

Then he confronted Pottinger with a fine air of magnanimity. "Have I satisfied you *now*, my friend?"

"For the present—yes," Pottinger answered, unimpressed. "In future it might be well to keep a stricter check upon your followers. There was also a certain paper sent by me to Hāji Ferōz——"

"A paper? *Wah-illah!* I must rebuke the Hāji for negligence of duty. To-morrow that matter shall be settled between us. At ten o'clock I will meet

you and Colonel Stoddart Sahib at the Citadel. It is agreed ? "

" It is agreed," answered Pottinger. " On the stroke of the hour we will be there."

True to promise, at ten next morning the two British officers entered the Hall of Audience.

It was empty.

" He won't turn up," said Stoddart.

" He will," said Pottinger, as they sat down, Afghan-fashion, on a couple of mats.

The minutes slipped on to half an hour ; to an hour ; to an hour and three-quarters. Still no sign of the Wazir ; and Stoddart sprang to his feet.

" Damn the fellow's impertinence ! Why should *we* stay kicking our heels here any longer ? "

Pottinger thrust out his lower lip. " I have said I will meet him here. I shall stay till he turns up. There is only one rule in dealing with that sort of scoundrel. Give him no handle against you—and keep a straight path."

" Is any good ever coming out of this ? It's an impossible game you're playing——"

Pottinger sighed. " I'm afraid it is. But till his Lordship and Mr. Macnaghten are convinced, I can only play it to the best of my power. Ah—the Wazir——"

Both men rose as Yar Mahomed swaggered into the hall at the head of his retinue.

" Aha, Pottinger Sahib ! " He waved his hand with a jaunty air more exasperating than open antagonism. Then he plunged into a lively account of a street disturbance that had entertained them by the way.

Pottinger listened patiently for five minutes. Then : " We have not waited here two hours, Wazir Sahib, to talk street gossip," he remarked incisively. " You may

remember we came at your request. If you have the leisure——"

Yar Mahomed scowled. "Leisure? Very well, let us go on. That paper you spoke of—I have considered it. *First*, I demand from your Government promise of a year's revenue, *then* I give you mine in exchange. Pay me, or promise me in writing, five lakhs of rupees, and you will hear no more of tyranny and extortion."

Pottinger shook his head. "Trees bud before they bear fruit," said he: "and, since the siege ended, I have looked in vain for buds. In any case I would refuse to dishonour my Government by bargaining with tyranny. Your conduct in this matter, Wazir Sahib, will force me to demand a *firman* from the King, forbidding extortion against his orders. Also my Government will hold you responsible for robbing and torturing those whom it is your duty to help."

At that, with a cryptic grunt, the Wazir turned upon his heel, and was confronted by a messenger summoning them to the Royal presence.

"Aha! *Now* it shall be seen which of us two his Majesty will uphold," he cried—and swaggered off without waiting, as usual, for Pottinger to precede him.

Stoddart turned to his friend. "Stand up to them, man. The affair's no business of mine. I'm best out of the way."

Pottinger nodded and passed on, his blood tingling at the studied insult.

When he presented himself, the Wazir was already in the field. Kamrān merely acknowledged the British agent's salute: and for a full half-hour Pottinger stood his ground while the Afghans carried on their talk as though none other were present. But that the interests of his own Government were at stake, he would have left

them, in five minutes, without a word. As it was, he drew nearer and saluted again.

"May it please your Majesty, I came by appointment with the Wazir to settle an affair of importance."

Kamrān regarded him a moment with insolent surprise; then turned again to Yar Mahomed Khan.

"What is this affair of which he speaks, my friend?"

Yar Mahomed spread out his hands. "Some fresh disturbance he is making, because of a paper promising to make an end of taxes. I have refused to sign it without the King's order."

Kamrān Shah drew himself up. "You did well. And what is this talk of a paper, Pottinger Sahib? Have not I myself said that unjust extortions shall cease?"

"From your Majesty I ask no more. But if Yar Mahomed Khan would save his face, he *must* retract in writing his declaration to tyrannise, in defiance of your Majesty's order——"

"*Bismillah!*" Yar Mahomed swung round with the snarl of a trapped wolf. "Hear how this fellow maligns me out of his own evil heart——"

But Pottinger—refusing to be goaded into anger—continued his statement and his conditions.

"*Wah—wah!* Fine conditions!" sneered Yar Mahomed, casting up his eyes. "These be lords of creation indeed.—Putting the King himself in leading-strings!"

"*Will* your Highness grant me a fair hearing—or no?" Pottinger demanded, smothered impatience in his tone.

But the Wazir's well-aimed shaft had pricked the King's sensitive spot.

"Why *should* I give hearing when I am ill and you speak words without sense? The Wazir knows my heart.

His wishes are mine. As for your talk of money and conditions—there has been no time yet for instructions to arrive. You are speaking mere inventions——"

But Pottinger had endured enough. "If your Highness believes *that*," he broke in hotly, "you have but to repeat it, and I leave the Citadel at once. Nor will I ever return to trouble you again."

The man meant what he said; and Shah Kamrān knew it. Fearful as he was of Yar Mahomed, he held in greater awe that colossal abstraction the British Government, whose rupees alone could restore his shattered city. Awkwardly, and irritably, he blurted out an attempt at apology; muttered of eternal gratitude to the saviour of Herāt, and finally reverted to the paramount subject of his own ill-health.

"What use to send flannel and *dewai* for my ailments one day and another day bring me into a fever like this? Here"—he put out a shaking hand—"I will look at those papers."

But Yar Mahomed hastily interposed. "Why endanger your Majesty's health to no purpose? What assurance have we that, on securing my signature, he can produce the money at all?"

It was a cunning suggestion, and Kamrān pounced on it. "True. What assurance have *we?* Bring the money to-morrow. *Then* it shall be seeu."

"Your Highness knows that is impossible," answered Pottinger, battling with a mad impulse to fly at the throat of Yar Mahomed Khan.

"Plague me no more, then, with papers and promises," thundered the royal invalid; and sank back among his cushions, his pock-marked face livid with unfeigned exhaustion. "Leave me. I am too ill for further talk. But by all the names of God I will commit what tyranny

I choose, and levy taxes also—until the day you bring me that money in full."

For answer, Eldred Pottinger saluted. "Your Majesty has spoken. It is enough," said he; and straightway departed—"unconquering, yet unconquered," as the sequel proved.

4

Too soon the results of that talk at the Citadel descended on the long-suffering people of Herāt.

Timidly, tentatively they had been slipping back into a more normal way of life. Shattered houses and shops were being repaired. With the help of money advanced by Pottinger, merchants once more sat hopefully among grain-bags and bales; and the sinister traffic of the slave-dealer had been scotched, though not killed. Now—in the flicker of an eyelid, without visible cause—all was changed.

On the 20th the British officers had gone up to the Citadel. On the 21st the word went forth. Taxes were to be levied as aforetime; gate-tolls enforced on all caravans; and the town duties were again cried aloud at the Pae-i-Takht. Within a day or two, siege prices prevailed; panic crippled trade activity and renewed the general exodus of terrified citizens.

The uphill work of five weeks seemed to be wiped out in as many days. Tyranny and Yar Mahomed Khan held the field; ably seconded by Shere Mahomed, of Ghoriān notoriety. He, whom the Wazir had disowned for surrendering a fortress, had since been rewarded with the governorship of a province. And now—within six weeks the Afghan brothers were reunited against a power that threatened to overrule their own.

But Shere Mahomed, politic always, disapproved of an open breach with the British—as yet. So he appeared at Pottinger's quarters, asking after his health, apologising for high language at their last interview. To which Pottinger replied that, for his own part, he valued acts before words. The Afghan, who had scarce an honest act to his credit, went away sorrowful; and Eldred Pottinger reverted to paragraph 27 of a formidable "demi-official," detailing current events for the benefit of a Government secretary, two thousand miles off: a secretary ignorant of the country and the people, yet empowered to issue impracticable instructions which the man on the spot must by some means contrive to obey.

That last week of October was a dismal one for the people of Herāt and for the British officers, who had striven to rescue them from the worst of their miseries. Others besides Shere Mahomed came secretly to excuse themselves for carrying out orders they dared not disregard. Openly, all who valued their skins must appear to support the tyrant.

On the 25th came the Chief Eunuch himself, eager to "accommodate the difference." But clearly all the accommodation was to be on Pottinger's side; and in that respect he was adamant. Demanding justice and upright government, he was too innately Western to realise that he might as well have asked the sea to have mercy on the shore as ask a Yar Mahomed to have mercy on those that were in his power. So the Hāji, deputed to demand, not to concede, also went away sorrowful; and tyranny pursued its course unchecked.

In the town and outlying villages, matters went rapidly from bad to worse. The renewal of gate-tolls and the rapacity of Yar Mahomed's followers without the walls

scared away indispensable caravans of grain and provisions. Rapine and disorder flourished without let or hindrance, since no man dared lift his voice against a follower of the Wazir.

For more than a week Stoddart and Pottinger stood aside, unwillingly enough.

"Give the scoundrel rope to hang himself with," said Stoddart; and both would cheerfully have assisted at the operation.

But there came a point at which Pottinger's exacting conscience rebelled against further acquiescence in evils he had publicly denounced. Moreover, Stoddart must be moving on to Bokhara, and was loth to leave his comrade in so critical a strait. The question arose: How far was Kamrān aware of it all? And so they decided to draw up a formal list of seven specific charges against Yar Mahomed; all amply proven. To these Pottinger added an appeal, simple and forcible enough to have stirred any ruler whose heart was not located in his bronchial tube.

"My business," it ran, "is to inform you of the true state of affairs and always to get you the support of the British Government. But if the Wazir continues to oppress the people in the manner described above, it is impossible for your Majesty's kingdom to exist. The English have delivered your Majesty from the hands of a foreign foe. But now an internal enemy is causing you ruin. . . . I submit that some order may be introduced into the affairs of the State. I also submit that when assistance is received from the British Government there will be no difficulty in remedying all this. Is it difficult for your Majesty to remit the taxes, so that your poor subjects may get some relief? Is it difficult occasionally to invite the Durrani Khans to the city and balm their wounded hearts? I pray God that He may shower His

mercy on your Majesty, and that the policy of His creatures may coincide with the will of Heaven."

That paper must be delivered in person, though dignity might resent a return, unsummoned, to the scene of defeat: and on the morning of the 30th, they betook themselves to the Citadel, where they found the Shah debating the points of a horse. Pottinger, determined to avoid fruitless talk, chose an opportune moment to come forward and present his paper, merely remarking that on account of high language at their last interview, he had not since waited on his Majesty.

Kamrān inclined his head, tucked the paper into his *kummerbund*; and the officers withdrew.

Evening brought no summons, and morning no news, save that the Shah and a party of chiefs were to go riding outside the city. The officers decided to join his train; and if opportunity arose, Stoddart would present a pair of detonating pistols, a parting gift already promised to the King.

It was a clear, crisp morning of October, with that first hint of frost in the air which quickens the blood and magically affects the spiritual barometer. Surfeited with inaction, both felt eager for the outing, glad to escape the misery-laden atmosphere of the streets.

"Hullo!" cried Stoddart, as they neared the drawbridge. "What's in the wind *now*?"

For at the entrance gate a strong body of the Wazir's troops had been drawn up, and the officers learnt that he himself, with an escort, had gone on to the Citadel. They learnt also, to their disappointment, that the King had been too unwell in the night to ride with the chiefs as arranged. To Hāji Ferōz, Peacemaker-in-ordinary, Stoddart spoke of the pistols and of his wish to present them. So a messenger was sent up, and soon returned with the desired summons.

In the Hall of Audience two of Yar Mahomed's Sultans sat gossiping on a rug. He had taken good care to precede them and secure a few minutes' talk with the King. So much for their chance of a fair hearing.

The royal invalid, propped against cushions, greeted them more coldly than the day before; and the Wazir, nodding at the intruders, continued his discussion of the letters from Ghoriān, commenting as freely on their contents as though the British officers were thin air.

For a while the Shah listened with an abstracted frown; then, turning to Pottinger, he drew out yesterday's folded paper and shook it almost in the writer's face.

"Think shame of yourself, Pottinger Sahib, to bring such false accusations at the bidding of others—desiring to work evil undetected. You that know every act of Yar Mahomed is by my order, thrust upon me these idle tales, to make division between myself and my Wazir, without whose zeal and fidelity the whole kingdom would fall in pieces."

Pottinger set his teeth and answered nothing. The looks of both men warned him to go warily. But the Shah rounded on Stoddart, coughing violently and reiterating his grievance.

"You give nothing but trouble, both of you. I told that fellow last week that I approved of all the Wazir's acts. What do you mean, then—bringing these false charges?"

"If they were false, your Highness, they would not be in that paper," Stoddart retorted bluntly, angered on Pottinger's account and regardless always of Asiatic etiquette. "The case of that Persian prisoner, for instance——"

"He was *not* a prisoner," snapped Yar Mahomed, showing his teeth like a vicious animal. "You *lie*."

The challenge infuriated Stoddart beyond control. "By God, it's *you* that are the liar!" he shouted, the suppressed mutual hatred of weeks flashing out like a sword whipped from its sheath. "First you fleece the people, then you make untrue statements to the King." Carried out of himself, he turned hotly upon Kamrān. "The truth is that your Majesty is being fooled by this man who, for all his smooth speech, is a traitor—a liar—and a dog."

At that the Afghan sprang forward with a snarl of rage. If a glance could kill, the Englishman would have left the Citadel feet foremost. And well had it been for Charles Stoddart had he died there and then. If Yar Mahomed withheld his hand, it was only that he might strike more slowly and secretly in the end.

Before he could speak, the Shah, choking with passion, had flung back the charge in Stoddart's teeth. "How dare you insult my Wazir to my very face," he thundered: and Stoddart, nothing abashed—

"It was *he* who first insulted me. I take not such words without retort from any man living."

But Kamrān waved him aside. "It is all false. You are liars, both of you. Never speaking a word of truth since you came. Promising aid; promising money; but giving nothing, while my people starve——"

And so on, *da capo*, *fortissimo*; till Stoddart, sick of waiting for a pause, fired protests into the main volley of sound; and Yar Mahomed shouted fiercely at no one in particular: "In God's name what have these English done that they should dictate to us in our own city?"

No one answered him. All three men spoke at once without the smallest concern for what another might say; and Pottinger, after a few unregarded attempts at cooler

speech, stood aside—half anxious, half disgusted—wondering what would be the end of it all.

It was Shah Kamrān's bronchial tube that settled the matter. With one comprehensive curse, he sank among his cushions fighting for breath. Stoddart, weary of undignified recrimination, laid the pistols before him. "I have brought these," he said, "in accordance with my promise. I will show your Majesty how to work them and then take my leave."

"This is the *first* time that you kept a promise," his Majesty commented ungraciously. But at sight of the coveted weapons a spark from the ashes of his dead youth gleamed in his eyes; and during Stoddart's brief demonstration the tension relaxed. But Yar Mahomed, loth to leave well alone, soon reverted to the Persians; and crowned his insolence by reading aloud, with emphatic gusto, letters received from the Wazir at Teherān. These were full of insinuations against the British; threats of a return in the spring if their officers were not dismissed; and underlying all, the frank assumption of a sovereignty which, six months earlier, both men had been readier to die than to admit.

"You hear, now, the wisdom of the Shah-in-Shah," Yar Mahomed urged, with a leer under his eyelids at the two officers. "Better agree. He will give you a country worth four of this."

The Shah's non-committal grunt signified nothing. And the Wazir, seeing that Pottinger would stand his ground, abruptly left the room.

With a sigh of exasperation Kamrān leaned back again; and the silence contrasted ominously with the ungoverned outburst that had gone before. It lasted near a minute. Then Eldred Pottinger—the one man who had kept his temper—stepped forward and spoke.

Sternly, yet without heat, he protested against the ingratitude and injustice of so grossly libelling those who had come to him in the simple discharge of their duty, hoping that a plain statement of facts might convince him of the Wazir's misrule. He briefly reviewed his own acts since his arrival in the city.

"And if in all these months I have broken faith or spoken an untrue word," he concluded, on a deeper note of feeling, "I beg you to name the occasion, that I may answer for myself. Let me assure your Majesty that Colonel Stoddart and I would sooner give up our lives than disgrace the country we serve or those whose name we bear. Let me also entreat you, in the name of the God of mercy, have pity upon your starving, suffering people. For in our Book of Books it is written that 'the merciful man doeth good to his own soul; but he that is cruel troubleth his own flesh.'"

It was a long speech for Pottinger; but although he had kept his head, his heart was hot because of the Wazir's conduct and the misery of those unfortunates, who looked only to him for help. Stoddart, cooler by this time, added a few words to the same effect: and Kamrān nodded in sullen acquiescence.

"Doubtless you have right; and the people also. In this ruined city there is not enough for all. If I am to ease the burden of those others you must give me money for myself; and if you desire *my* goodwill, you must be at one also with Yar Mahomed Khan."

He signified with a gesture that the Wazir be recalled; and the man came without haste or cordiality, the shadow of storm still in his eyes.

"See here, my friend," urged Kamrān. "These officers have spoken. Cannot the trouble be set right?"

"No. That is fool's talk," Yar Mahomed answered

bluntly. "Better to treat with the Persians than to endure the language used by these men."

In the face of such deliberate hostility further argument were obviously unavailing; and with a formal salute the British officers took their leave.

As they crossed the Hall of Audience Shere Mahomed Khan entered, exchanged greetings, and passed on into the royal presence. A trivial circumstance; but when the destinies of men hang in the balance, it needs but a grain of sand to turn the scale.

5

Their homeward walk through the dirt and desolation of the city was a silent one. The early nip had gone out of the air, the light of hope out of their hearts. Arrived at their lodgings they sat down and confronted the situation, not without an underlying sense of the ironic humour of it all. Only seven short months ago they had been exerting themselves fruitlessly to bring about some sort of understanding between Persia and Herāt, while Shere Mahomed was repudiated as a traitor. Now that very understanding had been achieved in their despite; and they themselves were threatened with loss of life, or dismissal from the city for which they laboured unsparingly—to this end.

Stoddart flung aside his turban and passed impatient fingers through his hair.

"This is a pretty state of things. I'm sorry I lost my temper, but not sorry I told that blackguard what I think of him. You know their engaging little ways. What do you make of it all?"

Pottinger considered a moment. "I think," he said

slowly, "that the brothers mean to break with us and accept Persia's conditions, sovereignty included; and I tell you frankly I was thankful to get *you* undamaged out of the Citadel!"

"H'm, yes. I suppose it was touch and go. The brutes would murder us if they dared."

"I don't doubt they *will*, if it suits their convenience," Pottinger answered coolly.

"Nonsense, man!" laughed Stoddart; but his laughter had a touch of uneasiness. "They might kill me. But you!—Look at all you've done for them!"

Pottinger shrugged, and opened his journal. He had lived for more than a year with Yar Mahomed Khan.

And evening brought a letter from the Citadel which justified his conviction. It purported to be from Shah Kamrān, and its language was as direct as a blow between the eyes.

Literally translated it ran thus—

> "Be it known to you, Mr. Stoddart and Mr. Pottinger, that since your arrival in this country you have offered many indignities to the Afghans. These dwellers of the desert have so great a sense of honour that they would rather die than put up with an insult; while you have become so impudent as to call the Wazir in my presence a liar and a dog. It is quite possible that you may be killed. I therefore order you to quit my territory. You must not remain here. You must go."

That the threat of murder was no empty one Pottinger learnt later, on good authority. The Shah and Wazir, it seemed, had decided on putting both officers to death; but had been dissuaded by Shere Mahomed on the ground

that dismissal would be more politic and serve the same end.

Pottinger handed the note to his friend. "That's plain enough," said he, "and on my soul it's a relief. If my presence is of no use to Government or to these unhappy people, I ask nothing better than leave to shake the dust of this blighted city off my feet."

"The sooner the better," agreed Stoddart, handing him back the paper. "If I were in your shoes, I'd not exchange another word with them, to save my life!"

While he spoke Pottinger was writing out a receipt for the letter and a request that a couple of guides be sent next day to escort them to the frontier. In spite of peremptory orders to quit, several days passed before these were forthcoming, and in the interval there occurred an incident so characteristic of Pottinger as to be worth recording.

Word came to him of an order from the Wazir that one of his Sultans, lately attached to Stoddart, should be tortured to death, presumably on account of the man's gratitude to the Englishman, who had once saved his life. Pottinger had doubted the Sultan's integrity while in their service; but his plight, and the assurance that only a word from Pottinger Sahib could save him, prevailed. Regardless of the open breach between them, Pottinger went straight to Yar Mahomed's house, rescued the man by offering to enlist him in his own service, and before leaving spoke a few private words of warning to the Wazir.

"I told him," he wrote in his letter to Government, "that as he had quarrelled with me, not with the State, he had better . . . throw himself on the clemency of the Governor-General, and neither fight nor rejoin with Persia, either of which courses must ensure him and his

family inevitable ruin. That advice he said he would follow, and would never quarrel with the British Government. I replied that he must change his conduct greatly or that would certainly come to pass."

Possibly this last remark set Yar Mahomed thinking; for next evening came a message to the officers' lodgings, asking Colonel Stoddart to call on the Minister before leaving Herāt.

That gentleman's comment on the proposal was brief and very much to the point. Pottinger supplemented the refusal by adding that the Wazir could expect nothing else after an insult for which no apology had been offered. He learnt, by chance, that the Shah was heartily ashamed of his behaviour; that neither had the least intention of parting with him, and were prepared to make any apologies he pleased, once Colonel Stoddart was gone.

"That's as may be," returned Pottinger, not impressed by this mark of royal favour. "To-day I accompany Stoddart Sahib one march out on his journey, returning next day to make preparation for my own."

Thus on the 5th of November, 1838, without further exchange of compliments, Charles Stoddart left Herāt;—its five gates closed and guarded to check the wholesale exodus that threatened directly the news of dismissal reached the people's ears.

The twelve-mile march to Parwāna was pure relief to Englishmen cooped up over-long in the unsavoury atmosphere of an Afghan city. The sense of freedom, the expanse of hill and valley, the winter sunshine and crisp, clean air swept the gloomy forebodings out of their hearts, saddened though they were at sight of the defacement wrought by that futile siege. Gardens and mosques—no matter how sacred—had all been sacrificed to the lust of destruction. Where orchards had clustered, the earth

was disfigured by blackened stumps ; nor had one among the countless magnificent plane trees been left to beautify the land in spring.

But the travellers had matters more personal to discuss before they parted : Stoddart's chivalrous mission on behalf of Russian captives, very characteristic of the period ; Pottinger's homeward route through Seistan and his hope that he might be of service at Kandahar, if rumours of Shah Shujah's reinstatement were true.

They slept that night at Parwāna and parted at dawn, each commending the other to God's good Providence as even Englishmen could do without false shame in that day of a simpler faith in the Unseen. Then each went on his way—alone among inimical aliens ; yet not disconcerted, because, for both, the promise made to Joshua was a promise for all time : " Be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed ; for I, the Lord, am with thee."

So they believed in the year 1838, and both had need of their belief through that which was to come.

Eldred Pottinger rode thoughtfully back to Herāt ; regret at his failure to achieve the impossible mitigated by relief at the near prospect of departure ; while Stoddart rode northward to Bokhara, congratulating himself on escaping intact from the neighbourhood of Yar Mahomed Khan.

Happily he did not guess that congratulation was premature. For there travelled in his train a servant paid by the Wazir to deliver a letter from himself to the Bokhara chief : a letter that conspired with Stoddart's disregard of local customs, and his arrogant, unbending temper, to bring about the slow years of imprisonment and brutality that culminated in a violent death. And not his own merely. For with him died his would-be liberator Arthur Conolly, lovable and beloved, even of

Asiatics, whose practices he fearlessly denounced and whose religion he dreamed of dethroning from its supremacy in Central Asia.

There are few more pitiful chapters in Anglo-Indian history than the story of that double imprisonment, of the indignities, the misery and suspense endured before death released those two isolated officers, abandoned to their fate by a country occupied with matters of greater moment.

And through it all Stoddart's pride and haughty temper militated against their chances of merciful treatment or ultimate rescue. A Russian officer, with whom he spent four months, between his first and second periods of imprisonment, declared that never was man more imperious and touchy, more unfitted to deal with Asiatics than Colonel Stoddart; brave and resolute gentleman though he was. It is the men of his temperament, who have always and everywhere stimulated the undercurrent of race hatred, that the finer spirits on both sides so heartily deplore.

At this time Stoddart might have left Bokhara with the help of his host, but he expected the British Government to set him free: and, although his own mission concerned the liberation of Russian captives, he resented the idea of owing his release to their Emperor. Pride of that stamp is a luxury for which a man may pay too dear.

Only once does his resolute spirit appear to have been completely broken—for a time. Not long after his arrival he fell foul of the Minister, who treacherously invited him to his house, where he was seized, bound, dragged through the streets by torchlight and lowered into a well alive with vermin, inhabited by Afghan murderers and thieves. After two hideous months spent in their

company, he conformed outwardly to the Mahomedan faith; and was restored to the light of day.

But in time the natural temper of the man reasserted itself; nor did his concession in the matter of religion avail to save his life, when—three years after—news of a retreating and massacred British army gave the Bokhara chief courage to strike the final blow.

It is said that, at the hour of execution, he sent word to the Amir that he died no Moslem, but a Christian at heart; while Conolly, offered his choice between death and apostasy, made answer stoutly: "Stoddart became a Mussulman and him you have killed. I am prepared to die."

And so an end of Charles Stoddart and Arthur Conolly; brave spirits both, whatever their failings: two mere units among the scores of good men who had, by that time, been sacrificed to the Simla Cabinet's "great game" in Central Asia.

6

Eldred Pottinger's lonely return to Herāt was not enlivened by the desolate aspect of the city, that smote him the more sharply after his brief respite. Streets empty and silent as in the worst days of the siege; half completed shops and houses deserted by builders who had been cheerfully at work there a week ago; bread at famine prices, sheep already scarce.

Two large grain *Kafilas*, it was said, had turned back within one march of the city on hearing that the Sahibs were to leave. The roads to Kandahar, Persia and Turkestan swarmed with fugitive Herātis; for the Wazir had been obliged to rescind his order in regard to the gates. Furious at being foiled, he had dispatched soldiers

experienced in brutality to waylay his unappreciative subjects, strip them and turn them loose to die of cold by the roadside.

Hearing these things and knowing himself debarred from action, the heart of Eldred Pottinger was torn between compassion for the people and his own natural longing to be gone from sight and sound of misery he was powerless to relieve. Tired with two days' marching, disheartened by seeming failure, he could come at no definite decision that night as to the line of conduct demanded by his duty to Government, to his suffering fellow-creatures and to his own self-respect.

Next morning his room was thronged with friends—Afghan, Hindu and Herāti—eager to welcome him and bring him gossip from the Citadel.

"Think not to depart, O champion of the distressed," said one who had spoken with Yar Mahomed himself. "Already the Wazir Sahib hath suffered abuse from the Shah for quarrelling with the English before friendship of Persia was secure."

From without came news of more stirring import. The Kandahar chiefs, it was rumoured, had received twelve thousand ducats from Russia, with a promise of thirty thousand more, and were moving on Herāt; and a Hindu merchant eclipsed all by announcing the imminent advance of a great British force from Ferōzepore.

In this fashion did Eldred Pottinger receive the first tidings of that "great game" wherein he was to play so noble yet so harassing a part. And, at the moment, no news could have been more welcome. Like too many men of that day he believed in the divine right of the Saddozai dynasty; and word of an approaching British army would have a salutary effect on his friends in the Citadel. They were obviously temporising to detain

him ; and as he had sent two of his own men with Stoddart, he had no wish to leave till they brought word of his friend's arrival on the farther side. Without seeming to heed Yar Mahomed's politic remorse, he gave out that his departure was unavoidably postponed ; and on the 12th the arrival of two Persian chiefs promised a more definite development one way or the other.

It took the form of a note from the Arz Begi [1] next morning, begging that Pottinger would go with him to the Minister's house and bring dissension to an end. The request amounted to an admission that yesterday's interview had failed ; and Pottinger, deeming that an additional twinge of anxiety might not be amiss, sent answer that without a written recall he doubted whether he would admit the Wazir to his quarters, much less honour him with a visit.

That firm tone produced a personal appeal from the Officer of Justice himself—a friend, honest enough to admit that, in spite of Colonel Stoddart's outburst, the British officers had right on their side. Moreover, he had boldly urged the Wazir not to disgrace the name of Afghan by an open breach with one who had never spared himself in their service ; and Yar Mahomed had sworn by all the names of God that his quarrel was not with the defender of Herāt, only with the man who had miscalled him before the King.

Pottinger listened till all was said ; then he remarked quietly, "I am glad you at least believe I have acted for the best. But has it not struck you, my friend, that the Wazir's regrets touch the slightest matter only ; while he ignores, for his own convenience, the real cause of it all. How should a few empty compliments and promises undo evil already done ? How shall the fugitive

[1] Officer of Justice.

citizens be recalled, the broken promises patched up, the violated pledges restored? As for their fashion of requiting my services, that is a trifle, though discreditable enough——"

"True, O Pottinger Sahib," the peacemaker interposed eagerly. "But is there not forgiveness, even with Allah, when men profess sorrow for past misdeeds?"

The Englishman shrugged his shoulders. "Professions are no better than false coin in the mouth of Yar Mahomed Khan. You yourself have seen how he will make promises, in Allah's name, here under my roof, and break them before reaching his own door. The fact that we worked and fought together for so long has made me more forbearing than he deserved. But he has exhausted even *my* patience."

"Nay, my friend, that is not the answer I desire. Have you no regard for the Wazir's entreaty that you should consider your own welfare and the interests of your country that will sustain great loss if this city should succumb to Russia or Irān?"

At the cunning of that final plea Pottinger laughed outright.

"Since when has Yar Mahomed grown so solicitous of my welfare and the interests of my country? You can assure him from me that, in comparison with the last, the first does not signify a straw; though I have no fear that my Government will rebuke me for upholding right and truth."

"The Sahib hath spoken." And the man departed, fervently repeating his desire to promote peace.

Two days later came a formal note from Yar Mahomed, enclosing letters from the Amir of Kābul to Mahomed Shah and the Russian Envoy, together with the draft of a treaty between himself and them. No request for

advice ; no word of apology or recall. And on the 20th Pottinger wrote to Macnaghten, recording events within and rumours without up to that date. Finally, in regard to his own position, he ventured a definite opinion worth quoting in view of after events.

"As I sent two of my men with Colonel Stoddart through the mountains, I am detained till they return, which I expect hourly, as more than a sufficient time has elapsed ; and I should feel anxious on that gentleman's account but that he wrote me a note by a messenger telling me of his safe arrival amongst the outliers of the Hazaras. I, at present, can see no way by which I may be able to remain here. The whole conduct of the Government has been so false and outrageous that the wildest fiction falls short of the reality, and their late conduct to Colonel Stoddart and myself, after the labour we have had in their service, makes it painful to think of remaining. This, however, I would not mind if I saw any hope of being able to forward the views of Government, or to be of any use ; but the disregard of Kamrān to my advice, and the opposition of Yar Mahomed Khan to everything tending to benefit the country, joined to the experience I have had of their former conduct, and their insulting carriage to myself, show me that my stay will not be productive of advantage ; but very probably of the contrary, by lowering their ideas of our honour and character, which I am glad to say they rate highly.

"I intend to return by the road of Seistan, and if possible may stay some time with the chiefs there until I can communicate with Mr. Leech in Khelāt, and hear if I can be of any use in that quarter."

But long before that letter reached Calcutta the future of Herāt had been mapped out ; not in accordance with facts, but in accordance with Macnaghten's over-ambitious

policy, which aimed at nothing less than Great Britain paramount in Central Asia.

As for Pottinger—before the return of his servants, he received letters from Simla that left him no choice but to remain and accept anything in the shape of an apology that Yar Mahomed might be disposed to honour him withal.

Macnaghten wrote, enclosing a fulsome letter from Lord Auckland to Shah Kamrān wherein the royal invalid—sodden with drink and drugs—found himself belauded for his "noble resistance," and for having "driven back the invading army with all its thousands, its guns, its munition," by the sole strength of his "courage and determination." In the same strain the Governor-General dilated on his zeal for the interests of Kamrān; advocated a firm and lasting bond of friendship with the British Government, and bade the Shah speak freely with his "true friend Lieut. Pottinger," who had already done much to deserve his lordship's approbation.

Pottinger folded up that remarkable document with an enigmatic smile. It left him little doubt as to the nature of his own instructions; and reverting to Macnaghten's letter, he learned that he must consider himself attached to the Kābul Mission from October 1, and act under the Envoy's instructions till further orders. He must inpress on the Shah the need of securing himself, at the present critical juncture, to a strong and friendly power.

"You will try and find out what assistance he would require from Government, and you will encourage his allying himself with us by the assurance that we shall receive his proposals with a liberal spirit. Should money be required you can draw on Captain Burnes for not more than one lakh of rupees" (£10,000).

So much for Yar Mahomed's preposterous demand and for Pottinger's visions of the road. Macnaghten's letter relieved him, at least, from the burden of indecision. It now remained simply to accept the Wazir's apology and devote himself afresh to the thankless task of making bricks without straw.

7

Lord Auckland's sugared phrases had at least the effect of paving the way to peace, which Pottinger now began to realise he was expected to keep at any price. The question remained—could he combine keeping the peace with the keeping of his earlier promise—that justice and exemption from slavery would be enforced while he represented his country at Herāt. Nor were matters simplified by the awkward fact that beyond vaguely worded offers of friendship, Pottinger had no certain knowledge of that country's future intentions, or the still more awkward fact that if any deed of his should chance to hamper those unknown intentions, the responsibility would be on his own head.

And there was none at hand with whom he could take counsel. Even his friend the Hakeem had gone southward on a journey; and the departure of Stoddart had made his isolation complete. The nearest Englishmen were Sir John McNeill at Teherān, seven hundred and fifty miles off; and at Shikarpore, farther off still, Alexander Burnes, now Lieutenant-Colonel and a knight to boot, coercing Baluchistan chiefs into some show of welcoming Shah Shujah, the Undesired; in his own words, "treaty-making on a great scale . . . and carrying all before me."

From neither of these had Pottinger heard for weeks,

and for months no personal packets from India had arrived to cheer him. For news of the outer world he depended on rumours brought by merchants of caravans, and sifting of a few possible grains of truth from a haystack of embellishments was tedious and harassing beyond belief. But caravans had become chary of calling since news of the Sahibs' dismissal scared the country-side: a practical compliment to British character, with which Pottinger could very well have dispensed at the moment.

Alone, unaided, and hampered by lack of knowledge, it remained only to use his best discretion and pray that the "laudatory wig" might not be his reward.

Verily there is no school for manhood comparable to service in these far-off outposts of Empire, where character is fired and moulded, often painfully enough, "in the furnace of responsibility and on the anvil of self-reliance"; where boys in their twenties may be called upon to play the explorer, the soldier, the administrator, by turns or all at once, as circumstances dictate. Pottinger having played the two first, with distinction, was not permitted to escape the third: for him, the least congenial of the three. But in this line of service, as in all he undertook, thoroughness, judgment and tenacity of purpose were the outstanding qualities of his work. Not often—even in the varied vicissitudes of political pioneering—has it fallen to the lot of a British subaltern, barely seven-and-twenty, to cope single-handed with a Yar Mahomed Khan: a man of nearly twice his age and ten times his experience; more than his equal in ability and strength, with the fiend's own cunning superadded, and never the ghost of a scruple to hamper him in word or deed.

Pottinger, sitting late into the night—alone with his thoughts and his problem—saw before him a struggle

compared with which the struggle for Herāt had been child's play ; saw, too, that his position—though strengthened by Government sanction—was harder to maintain than during the siege. Then, all minor dissensions had been merged in concerted action ; now—when policy demanded even closer co-operation with those in authority —the very credit of his country and his own promise to the people compelled an attitude of continual opposition, except in the matter of supplying funds for the restoration of tillage and trade. For this reason alone, did Yar Mahomed accept Lord Auckland's tenders of friendship, and tolerate the presence of a British agent at Herāt.

Before morning Pottinger had decided on a line of action that might enable him to hold his own till Government saw fit to grant him the stronger support. Since there was no hope of forcing the Wazir to deal justly and humanely by his people, Pottinger resolved to temporise, on condition that none of his measures be considered binding and that judgment on the Wazir's conduct be left for Government to pronounce.

A note to this effect brought a converted Yar Mahomed to his quarters next morning. Here they discussed matters amicably, with excellent result. Pottinger proposed that the collecting of taxes and the dispensation of justice be placed entirely in his own hands, while the Wazir should positively undertake to forgo treasonous correspondence with foreign states and suppress the traffic in slaves.

So the matter was settled : Pottinger threw all his energies into work that came as a welcome relief after a spell of inaction aggravated by desolation, as week followed week and no word of greeting came from those he loved in India or at home. True, his uncle wrote regularly once or twice a month, but so unsettled was

the state of the country beyond Kābul, that many letters went hopelessly astray, while the rest would arrive at long intervals in batches of two and three, irrespective of their dates of dispatch.

As Christmas drew near, with its sacred memories, the inner ache became harder to ignore, and work, however harassing, a gift of the gods. Intricate tax settlements and the dispensing of justice—when delinquents could be caught—left little time for letters to Government and none for private anxieties. At the Pae-i-Takht he was loyally supported by his friend the Arz Begi; and his reappearance there had an immediate effect upon the exodus that had threatened to empty the city.

British dominion in the East can boast few greater assets than implicit belief in the good faith and unlimited power of the Sahib. By means of this asset, coupled with his own tact and firmness, Pottinger speedily set his placable measures in rough working order. Nor did he confine his attention to civic problems. Ceaselessly he exerted himself on behalf of the very poorest, the starving, homeless, human creatures who thronged the by-ways and windowless houses, who cared nothing for taxes or justice, but cried for bread. Under his supervision, more than a thousand of these were fed daily in the market-place, on the only food procurable: a very coarse broth of *jowaree* and millet boiled up with salt and fat from the *doomba* sheep. This horrid decoction was swallowed as if it had been nectar; and its distribution became the supreme event of the day. Among this destitute remnant were countless orphans; and to these Pottinger's heart went out with peculiar tenderness. No less than forty of them he saved from slavery and kept under his personal care while he remained in Herāt. On leaving he commended them to Major Todd, with the

result that they were decently educated and taught trades for their own support. Six he took with him to Calcutta and placed in the College of Medicine, where Conolly had placed his good friend the Hakeem.

For in Eldred Pottinger the two-fold zeal of the soldier and philanthropist burned with no less fervour than in Henry Lawrence himself. History may remember him as the defender of Herāt; but the citizens for whom he wrought must have remembered him rather as their saviour. The defence, being more effective and of greater political moment, stands recorded in full. But beyond tributes from Sir John Login and Sir John Kaye, there remains scant record of his arduous struggle against injustice and brutality, slavery and famine. Only from letters, private and official, have the details of that struggle been gleaned and set down to complete the record of his larger, more heroic achievements.

By the end of December—despite interludes of paralysing panic—trade and tillage had been revived; the taxes reduced to a minimum; much suffering redressed; rough justice set on foot. Though this timid renewal of life flourished under the lee of a human volcano, it was no small matter that, for a space, the people had leisure to breathe and barter and pray; for a space there was peace in the land.

8

But prolonged peace under the rule of Yar Mahomed Khan was a miracle past praying for.

Early in January Pottinger discovered that the Wazir had secretly dispatched a caravan of slaves with a grain *Kafila* that had left the city a few days before. The news

roused him to a fury of indignation. This was the sin of all others that he most strenuously opposed; and now he went straight to the Citadel, resolved that the caravan should be recalled and he would go surety for repayment of the money; or, in the last resort, he would threaten to leave Herāt.

But Yar Mahomed in an obdurate mood was a match for any Englishman on earth. The people were his to sell when there was need. Argument, entreaty, threats—all were unavailing; and Pottinger, maddened by the covert smile—half insolence, half amusement, at this display of Feringhi madness—would fain have struck the man across his cruel mouth. But, in his own words, policy obliged him to restrain his wrath and rest content with a vigorous protest; an assurance that the matter would be fully reported to the Indian Government. And so an end—for the time being.

But late that night, as he closed his Journal and pushed back his chair, the encompassing silence brought forth a sound unusual at such an hour: a low, insistent knocking at the outer door.

It proved to be his staunch adherent Mirza Ibrahim, who through all contingencies had borne himself friendly, and who now appeared in some distress of mind.

"Well, Mirza Sahib, to what do I owe this honour?" Pottinger asked, after greetings. "A strange hour for calling; but your visits have always been in the way of friendship."

"As always—so now, helper of the helpless," the man replied, with a deep obeisance. "The heart of the Sahib is hot within him—is it not so?—because my master hath disposed of twenty or thirty useless ones in exchange for money—needful to all?"

And Pottinger: "Yes, my heart *is* hot; not only

because of men and women handled and bartered like cattle, but because it is impossible that two men can work together for the same end if the feet of one be set upon a rock, and of the other upon shifting sand."

"Nay, Sahib, for the love of Allah say not impossible," the Afghan pleaded, with genuine fervour. "There be difficulties in this matter beyond what appear; but in truth it is not the desire of my master lightly to break his engagements with your noble country. And hearing there had been some talk of departure, I am come hither in secret to beseech the true friend of Herāt that he will *not* desert this city and this people that, without his aid and championship, had never been lifted from the dust of destruction."

Before the last words were spoken the man had sunk upon his knees, taken off his turban, and laying it at Pottinger's feet, bowed his forehead to the ground. A request so proffered was one that no true-hearted man could resist; moreover, the Afghan had done Pottinger more than one service in the past year, and he was not sorry to have an opportunity of doing him a good turn.

"In respect of leaving Herāt I had come to no decision," said he. "But now it is otherwise. The goodwill of my Government is towards your city; therefore, because this request is *yours* and made in the name of the people—I will stay."

"Praise be to Allah, the compassionate, the merciful!" And the Mirza, rapidly muttering a *fattiyah*, would have saluted Pottinger's feet, but the Englishman raised him by the shoulder.

"It is enough," he said, smiling and presenting the discarded turban. "I owe you a service. I am glad to pay my debt."

"And you will see my master?"

"If he will call on me to-morrow—yes; and if he is prepared to renew his former promises, with better intention of keeping them than heretofore."

It seemed that he was so prepared; and he came—all suavity and concession. The old ground was gone over for the fiftieth time, the old promises renewed, more for the sake of moral effect than from any real hope that he would keep them a moment longer than a veneer of virtue served his turn.

For the moment readjustment was complete; and by now Eldred Pottinger, though by nature ardent and impatient, had learned the invaluable art of living from moment to moment; of concentrating all his energies on the passing day instead of diffusing them by vain attempts to see beyond the horizon.

With matter-of-fact quietness, he carried on his self-appointed task, appearing daily at the Pae-i-Takht and in the market-place at feeding-time; and within the week there came an official document from Macnaghten which made clear to him, once for all, that whatever Yar Mahomed might do, or leave undone, he himself would be expected to retain his foothold at Herāt.

The letter opened with a formal intimation of his appointment on a consolidated salary of one thousand rupees a month. It acknowledged the receipt of his first account of events written after the siege, an account "perused with much interest by the Governor-General," who bade his representative "observe the strictest economy" and apply the sum forwarded by Burnes "to the most beneficent purposes."

In truth, the whole document served to increase rather than lighten the burden of responsibility that already weighed heavily on Pottinger's conscientious soul. Stripped of official verbiage, four hopelessly conflicting

commands stood out plain and clear : strict economy ; the promotion of peace and prosperity ; no offence to powerful individuals ; no check on the authority of the Wazir : a promising prelude to the reconciling of all parties which he must strenuously endeavour to promote.

Dearly would he have liked, at that moment, to set Mr. Secretary Macnaghten in his own shoes for three months, and then confront him with the query : " How, in the face of four-cornered facts, can these things be ? "

But awkward questions and the statement of awkward facts were not in the bond. Macnaghten, like most ardent theorists, suffered from constitutional short-sightedness—an infirmity from which Pottinger was ultimately to suffer much and British India more. The two men had small affinity in temperament or in political outlook ; and from the first Pottinger did not relish the prospect of working under the new-made envoy. As for his own appointment, complimentary though it was, he would rather have been on his way to China, absorbed in geographical research, far removed from the subtleties of diplomacy, for which he possessed no natural gift.

His own opinion on the subject is revealed in a brief review of his services, written two years later on account of friction with Macnaghten, who, from first to last, proved a stone of stumbling in his path. " The Governor-General, unasked by me, appointed me an assistant of Sir William Macnaghten, with instructions to keep on friendly terms with the Herāt Government, a thing perfectly impossible. Left to myself, as an English subject I could get on very well ; but as an agent I could not keep on the jostling, shouldering, retaliatory system by which men of rank hold their own in Afghanistan."

This he already foresaw ; yet there could be no question

of refusal, of withdrawing his hand from the plough. He supposed that, in time, a mission would be sent to his support and the town fortified, if not garrisoned, to some purpose. Till then the impossible must by some means be achieved—for the sake of the downtrodden Herātis, for the sake of a Government evidently determined to take the whole province under its elastically expansive wing; and above all, for the sake of that dear mother in Ireland, who needed all the practical help he could give her, in view of the chronically unsettled state of his father's affairs.

But on thoughts of his mother and of Ireland he resolutely shut the door of his heart; and went forth into the market-place to banish ghosts and hear the evening's news.

9

Letters at last! Letters in handwriting more welcome than that of Mr. Secretary Macnaghten or Sir John McNeill. Two from his uncle; one from his old friend and Commandant Captain Ward; and better than all, one from Ireland—a costly treasure, stamped 2*s.* 6*d.*—addressed in the needle-pointed handwriting of John Pottinger, eldest of the eight brothers and sisters who were all being drawn irresistibly towards the East.

John had returned on sick leave not long since; and Eldred, slipping a penknife round the seal, scanned the crossed sheet; then glanced at the heading, "Dublin. Aug. 3rd, 1838." And he who read sat in a mud house in Herāt on the 12th of January, 1839. But Anglo-Indians of that day were inured to the leisurely traffic between East and West, not entirely devoid of compensations; and Eldred Pottinger, anxiety set at rest, gave

himself up to unhurried enjoyment of his brother's lighter, livelier outlook on men and things.

"My dear Eldred,

"It is now a long time since you and I have exchanged epistles, but I have heard of you from many quarters; all, especially my Uncle Henry, speaking of you in the highest terms of praise; from which I judge you have been successful in your journey to Khorassan. My uncle mentioned in his last letter to my mother that he had applied to the Governor-General to have you appointed political agent at the Court of Sindh. I know it will be opposed by that stupid old fool who *sleeps* 'in the chair of honour'; but I still hope this may find you ensconced in all the dignity of *chargé d'affaires* at Hyderabad, with the salary of fifteen hundred or two thousand rupees a month, which will put you in a fair way of restoring to life the fallen dignity of the House of Pottinger!

"By the way, I may give you a bit of advice: make up your mind not to marry under fifty thousand pounds! The women here make desperate love to me, but when they find I am not heir apparent (query, to what?) it is amusing to see how soon their ardour cools. I am really not joking, though, when I hope to see you some day spliced to a fortune.

"My father has put his affairs, or rather your affairs (the Kilmore property), into the hands of old Alick Stewart, who takes a great interest in you; and, such as it is, it will come to you unencumbered, which is more than I expected. For what my grandfather began my father has finished; and you are the sufferer! . . . But, careless as he has been of

your interests and his own, he loves you, Eldred, better than you think ; and has, even at the eleventh hour, done all in his power to retrieve his former extravagance ; and when I read him my uncle's letter about you, I never saw any person more delighted than he was at hearing your praise.

"I have been in wretched health ever since I came to England ; and am now living in lodgings here in order to be near the doctor. . . ."

For the rest, local and family news, welcome after months of isolation. And equally welcome, in another fashion, was the first word of congratulation on his own achievement from Captain Ward, whose faith in him had quickened his zest for adventurous travel.

"My dear General," he read—and smiled while he glowed at the extravagant compliment—

"A packet goes off this evening to your uncle, and I cannot let it be dispatched without congratulating you on all the honours you have gained. Now that you have a little leisure you may look back and be proud of the assistance you have afforded to a gallant and noble defence. You have merited nobly of the British Government both in Europe and Asia ; and I trust you may soon have substantial proofs of the high estimation in which your character is held by both parties. The retrograde movement of the Persians and the safety of Herāt will completely change Lord Auckland's plans, I should imagine. I fear he has not been playing the best game in selecting Shah Shujah for our puppet. We might equally well have gained our ends with Dōst Mahomed and without the ruinous expense in which the present plan will involve the country. . . ."

Unhappily, as has been shown, Lord Auckland had seen no reason to cancel his costly enterprise; and Colonel Pottinger's letter, dated the 7th of December, already foreshadowed breakers ahead in Sindh. It foreshadowed also further friction with Sir Alexander Burnes—already proving a serious political obstacle to the man whose forbearance, discretion and restraint went far to save the Army of the Indus from an initial disaster in Sindh.

For the most part Colonel Pottinger's letter overflowed with fatherly joy and pride in his "dearest Eldred," seasoned with sound advice; and the one, no less than the other, brought refreshment to the nephew who loved him as a son.

"I must now, my dear Eldred," he wrote, having briefly dismissed the affairs of Sindh, "congratulate you from the bottom of my heart on the magnificent orders which the Governor-General has issued about you. I have no doubt that you will be knighted and field-officered as soon as your conduct is reported at home. Before I saw the order I wrote to ask what was to become of you. I have since written to Bombay for political kit for you, which I hope to receive in time to forward by the Bengal Army as far as Kandahar. I think of asking Major Todd to take charge of it, so that you can let him know your wishes about its dispatch to Herāt. I would strongly advise you to apply to have as great a portion of your allowances as you can spare paid to Forbes and Co., Bombay. It will accumulate in their hands, and when you want it sent to Europe I will manage it for you free of commission. . . .

"Save every rupee you can to buy an estate and re-establish yourself as Head of the Family. We have all reason to be proud of you, and I have been overwhelmed with congratulations from all quarters, at your '*Burra*

Nám.' On one point I must warn you. That is, not to advance a rupee to your father, or any of your relations. To him it will do no good ; and had you not most generously given up your £5,000, your now settling it on your sisters would have been an act worthy of you. . . .

" I am determined you shall *save money.* ' Them's my sentiments.' I will perhaps add a P.S. when I get to Vikkur.

" God bless you, my dear boy. Take all care of yourself and write to me whenever you have opportunity, if only two lines ; as *we are all* most and constantly anxious about you ; and I am

" Your most affectionate uncle,

" Henry Pottinger."

Whatever Eldred Pottinger may have lacked of the lighter lucrative qualities that make for popularity, he possessed the greater gift of commanding love and admiration from all who knew him intimately enough to penetrate the outer shell of modesty and reserve. To this fact almost every surviving letter bears witness.

Of himself, too, it was characteristic that, while following Colonel Pottinger's advice, he sent money home regularly to his mother, till the day of his death. A rare and notable record, this of a mother-and-son devotion, owing nothing to the tie of blood ; the more notable because Eldred Pottinger was the child of his own dead mother rather than of his talented but unstable father : and the bond between them gave an added depth to his young life ; an added glory to hers.

Cheered and refreshed, he turned hungrily to the packet of newspapers that contained, among other items, the *Gazette*, already quoted, with its stirring tribute of praise. Thoroughly to absorb and digest his feast of good things

took time; and he promptly began a letter to his uncle while the sense of contact was fresh upon him.

So, for a while, he escaped in spirit from the harassing strain of life at Herāt; and for that while he had respite from the cry of the hungry and the guile of Yar Mahomed Khan.

10

Two days later, he sat again at his table, writing to Macnaghten of his compromise with the Wazir and of the caravan incident: adding by way of self-justification: "I was anxious not to meddle with internal affairs, but felt, if I did not, it would be utterly impossible to stop tyranny and slave-dealing; for no one remains who has courage to bring offenders to punishment, and nothing but my appearance in the bazaar at Pae-i-Takht will stop the stream of emigration and induce the people to begin the cultivation of their fields. . . . I have thus briefly described the present state of things, and trust I shall be able to keep them so till support arrives. . . . The Persians are strengthening and provisioning Ghoriān. . . . The Hazaras, and all the other tribes, are quite independent, plundering the roads and making war as they please. . . . Every one is awaiting with anxiety the progress of our army, and at present a single brigade may march unopposed to the banks of the Amoo, if it once pass Kandahar. . . . Sir John McNeill writes that the state of things at Teherān was very unsatisfactory . . . that everything in Persia depends on the Army of the Indus."

And how was it faring, that army of the high-sounding title borrowed from Napoleon?

Well for all concerned, could it have borrowed some of

the great Emperor's genius for the art of war. But from the outset, genius and justice were conspicuous by their absence. "The plan of campaign," wrote Sir Henry Durand, "violated, in a glaring manner, all usual military precautions. Although, in Eastern wars, the leaders of our armies have dared much—yet never before, during the history of British power in India, has so wild, ill-considered and adventurous a scheme of aggression been entertained": a stricture that yet reflects no discredit on that able and resolute soldier, Sir Henry Fane. Commander-in-Chief though he was, he seems to have been allowed little voice in the general scheme of advance: and his haughty spirit must have brooked with impatience the crude military ideas of political officers, eager to achieve their own purposes with the least possible delay, by shutting their eyes to lions in the path. Yet, before advance could be achieved, certain of these lions demanded not merely recognition but coercion, by fair means or foul.

The objections of Ranjit Singh—as has been said—involved marching the main army up through Sindh; which also involved a direct breach of treaty with the Amirs of that country.

Weak and wealthy, these princes clung tenaciously to their shadow of independence that must succumb in time to Sikh or British power: and they were now to be told that, in the present crisis, the main article of their treaty must be suspended; that in addition they must pay a heavy subsidy, agree to the presence of a reserve force in support of the army, and renew their annual tribute to Shah Shujah that had lapsed for thirty years.

Divested of diplomatic draperies, the simple plan of action amounted to this: The Amirs' money was to be taken, their country occupied, their treaties set aside,

in return for empty promises of goodwill. And Henry Pottinger—lately promoted to Sindh—was called upon, as Resident, to carry out this policy of mingled injustice and aggression, while at the same time avoiding all risk of open hostility that might delay the "grand promenade." All things were to be done in friendliness and in order; yet in all things the will of the British Government must prevail.

It was an anomalous position for a man notably clear-eyed and high-minded, a man as jealous as his nephew for England's good name in the East. But the fiat had gone forth. Shah Shujah, with his contingent, had crossed the Indus higher up and marched to Shikarpore. Sir John Keane with five thousand troops had set sail from Bombay; while the Bengal army, twenty thousand strong—encumbered with thirty thousand camels and as many camp followers—was marching, under Fane and Sir Willoughby Cotton, from Ferōzepore. Henry Pottinger must so play his hand that this unwieldy mass should pass peaceably through Sindh; and he resolved that no word of Lord Auckland's terms should be known till the arrival of the Bombay troops should enable him to enforce his unpalatable demands.

But he reckoned without Alexander Burnes; and by the end of December found himself in an impasse demanding all his coolness, discretion and forbearance: a Government that could not or would not perceive the real difficulties involved; local princes increasingly suspicious; on the south, Sir John Keane landed at Vikkur only to find himself paralysed for lack of transport and grain; on the north, Sir Alexander Burnes—"dressed in a little brief authority"—harassing his superior officer with drafts of impracticable treaties and the premature disclosure of Lord Auckland's demands. This last

incensed the Amirs, endangered the safety of British officers in Lower Sindh, and increased tenfold the difficulties with which Pottinger had been struggling for weeks.

A sharp reprimand sped up the Indus as rapidly as might be. But the mischief was done. The Amirs were up in arms; the new treaty rejected and Pottinger himself insulted by the men whose confidence he had won against difficult odds. The Baluchis assembled in strength. Hostilities seemed inevitable; and an advance contingent of the Bengal army, marching up to join Macnaghten and his king, must now hurry southward in support of Pottinger and Sir John Keane at Hyderabad. Such was the confusion wrought by a few injudicious words from one man's mouth: and that man, egoist in the grain, openly gloried to Cotton "in having done his utmost to provoke the wrath of the Amirs."

Macnaghten, blind as Lord Auckland as to the actual issues, saw only the grand enterprise in danger of a postponement that might frustrate all. For near a month he was forced to remain stationary with a king who already began to yearn for the inglorious peace of Ludhiana: yet it never occurred to him that the weeks wasted in useless impatience might have been utilised in sending forward grain and forage, in taking precautions as to water and acquainting himself with the barren and difficult route ahead. He seems chiefly to have exhausted his energies in railing at the soldiers—from first to last, the scapegoats of political ineptitude; till at last word reached him that all was well. The vacillating princes of Sindh, startled at the hornets' nest that buzzed about their ears, had withdrawn their opposition and swallowed the new treaty whole, including the detested tribute to Shah Shujah.

With that not very creditable victory ended the first act of the Afghan drama : a first act in which the outstanding hero was Colonel Henry Pottinger. Admittedly, it was his discretion, his firm, yet forbearing policy—unhurried by the misguided hastiness of his own Government—that prevented hostilities and saved the situation, though to " save the face " of his country was an achievement beyond his power.

And now, at last, the unwieldy Army of the Indus turned its back on Sindh : a veritable moving city, distressfully hampered by baggage camels and camp followers. For all Sir Henry Fane's insistence upon light equipment, eleven years of peace conditions had demoralised all ranks. Many young officers would as soon have marched without sword or pistols as without dressing-case, hair-wash and scented soap. Jams and pickles, plate and wax candles were all reckoned indispensable to the " efficiency of the corps." One regiment refused a proffered gift of cigars on the score that their mess baggage already included two camel-loads of the best Manilas. And it is on record that a certain cavalry officer took with him forty servants : well that he should be nameless !

But servants, camels and followers—all were gone at last : and Henry Pottinger—sorely tried in health and temper—frankly wrote his mind to Government on the subject of Alexander Burnes ; at the same time tendering his resignation of a post he had held for little more than a year.

" I did not know," he wrote, " when accepting the appointment of Resident in Sindh that I should be colleagued with Sir Alexander Burnes ; nor that he would be allowed to act as censor to his superior's despatches, or avail himself of instructions peculiarly mine, to carry out

his own plans; and that in opposition to the fact that those instructions were to be kept a profound secret till I chose to make them known. . . . While at Kutch, I suffered a long series of indignities from the fact that the Bombay Government attached importance to Burnes's unfounded misrepresentations: . . . and had I known that my present appointment would connect me even slightly with him I should have refused it. While Sir Alexander Burnes was on his Kābul mission he was under my orders as regards Sindh; yet the moment he crossed the Sindh frontier he wrote direct to Government impugning all my measures from first to last. The matter was easily explained; but the motive angered me, and I told him so in plain terms."

A good deal more in the same vein, was followed by his resignation, couched in terms as plain as the rest.

"By the time this letter reaches your Lordship the affairs of Sindh will be more or less settled, and in consequence I beg to be relieved from a post in which heavy official drudgery has been rendered a hundredfold more irksome by the trouble I have had with Sir Alexander Burnes. I have kept silence for a long while, lest any open discord between us should cause public inconvenience; and my friends alone know what it has cost me to suppress, for so long, my annoyance and disgust."

With the signing and sealing of that letter the long strain was at an end. The mere writing of it had been a relief; but it was a matter of months before his resignation could take effect. The year was nearly ended when at last he sailed for England; there to enjoy a well-earned rest, till trouble in China sent him Eastward again to win fresh laurels for a name already famous throughout India.

11

On the last day of January—while Henry Pottinger was writing his mind to Lord Auckland—his nephew sat alone in his mud-walled box of a room, reviewing the past six weeks with a tempered satisfaction such as he had rarely felt since the day Herāt was delivered into his charge.

At last he had hit on a scheme more or less workable, though one party to its accomplishment were a Yar Mahomed Khan; and news of an approaching British army had wrought a wholesome effect on both brothers, twin authors of all discord and disaster. Since the caravan incident Pottinger had heard no more of slave traffic on a large scale, though he now knew his man too well to suppose that smaller secret transactions were not still carried on; even as an undercurrent of Persian intrigue persisted under the most convincing veneer of good behaviour. Though the last was the more serious political offence, it was always the tyranny and slave traffic that aroused Pottinger's hottest indignation. Even at the risk of political friction, he waged obstinate war against the accursed thing, demanding, with the divine impatience of youth, immediate abolition of a habit ingrained in the race, sanctioned by Mahomed himself.

Denunciations having failed, he was now trying the more persuasive method of reward. "Yar Mahomed Khan and his adherents," he wrote to Sir John McNeill at this time, "had begun to sell the wretched inhabitants in droves, notwithstanding my remonstrances; and on procuring coin, I, for the sake of these unfortunate beings, consented to pay the amount of his and his men's allow-

ances, conditionally on their stopping this horrible traffic and giving up all control of the taxes ; in which situation I am awaiting instructions and aid."

Thus, for the moment, he had bought comparative peace for himself and the people ; armed neutrality, rather ; for always a hidden undercurrent of antagonism kept his senses alert, his nerves at strain. Even among his own escort and servants there was none in whom he dared trust save his old comrade, the brave but thick-headed Allah Dad Khan.

Of late, renewed Persian intercourse had disturbed his more friendly relations with the Wazir ; consequently Yar Mahomed's followers had been encouraged to gratify their barbarous taste for amusement at the expense of those whom Pottinger made it his business to protect. And now, when the promised allowances fell due, he asked himself, was he justified in keeping his share of the bargain for the sake of peace, when these incorrigible Afghans failed to keep theirs ?

It would be so much simpler to ignore awkward details and pay the price of peace. Nerves and temper had been a good deal tried during the past week, and his health already showed signs of resenting the long strain put upon it ; the ill-cooked, greasy food, the insanitary conditions of Herāt at its best.

While he debated, came sounds of arrival. Evidently a visitor of rank ; for there were followers.

Then the door opened, and Tāj Mahomed—a man of his escort—announced, " Sirdar Shere Mahomed Khan."

Visits from the Sirdar were infrequent, and Pottinger foresaw trouble, even while he returned the fulsome greeting : " May you be in the sanctuary of the Creator, preserved from all accident and mischance of the world."

" I am honoured, Sirdar Sahib," he said, not without

a tinge of irony; and bade the attendant Khans be seated on rugs; Shere Mahomed and himself occupying the only chairs.

"I come on account of my brother, Pottinger Sahib," the Afghan announced bluntly. "He sends word that, the month being ended, he desires you should muster his men to-morrow and pay them according to promise."

Tone and request combined turned the scale against peace.

"Has the Wazir so faithfully kept his word that he can, without confusion of face, demand the fulfilment of mine?" There was a note of challenge in Pottinger's voice. "Promise of payment was made on condition, as you know; and you also know whether it is justly due."

At that Shere Khan—who was in an evil mood—flung restraint and courtesy to the winds.

"You refuse payment? *Bismillah!* This comes of putting faith in Feringhi liars!" he shouted, squaring his shoulders pugnaciously: and before Pottinger could contradict, he let loose a torrent of Afghan abuse. "Much advantage to *us* that we refrain from extortion that is our *right*," he concluded furiously, "if we are to be cheated of compensation because low-born men have suffered at the hands of the soldier-*lōg*. They be not babes, these men. When the desire is upon them they are as fed horses in the dawn. And how should this *dog* try to curb them with a silken thread——!"

The abusive epithet, hurled in Pottinger's face, set his blood tingling.

"Enough, Sirdar Sahib. Leave my house at once."

But the Afghan's blood was up also. "I go not till my business is done," he retorted, his black eyes flashing. "*Wah-illah!* You arrogant English deem yourselves kings of the world!"

Pottinger dismissed further talk with a peremptory gesture.

"As for the Wazir's business—I have not yet refused payment. I will settle that with Yar Mahomed in person; not with one who insults myself and my Government. Go at once: or by Allah, my men shall turn you out."

The big Afghan stared in frank insolence. "Turn me out! A likely tale!"

"Tāj Mahomed! Allah Dad!" shouted Pottinger: and two Herātis of his escort stood in the doorway: Allah Dad having gone on an errand to the bazaar.

"The Sirdar Sahib hath insulted me and refused to leave my house. Put him out!"

For all the anger in his eyes, the men's hesitation was evident. They would cheerfully have died for their master in open fight; but fear of the Afghan ran in their blood.

Shere Mahomed laughed aloud. "*Inshallah!* Said I not so? There is no man in this house, Pottinger Sahib, who *dares* put me to the door."

It was a challenge, direct, unmistakable. It infuriated Pottinger, as it was meant to do. He seized the Afghan by the shoulders, forcing him to his feet. Shere Mahomed would have resisted violently; but that the startled onlookers sprang up and dragged the two men apart.

"What use to make further trouble, my friend?" urged a placable old Khan, securing the Sirdar's arm. "Pottinger Sahib hath right of command in his own house."

"'Tis a right I shall not dispute with him again," Shere Mahomed answered sullenly, and allowed himself to be drawn into the street.

Left alone, Pottinger sat down and leaned his head

on his hand—wondering, between anxiety and exasperation, what would happen next. An Afghan's insolence and his own hot temper might have cancelled, in ten minutes, the work of weeks. If recrimination followed in place of apology, he might even be obliged to leave the city. Bitterly he regretted his loss of self-control; while admitting few Englishmen and no Irishman could or would have acted otherwise.

What was that? He sat up and listened.

Distant shouts drew rapidly nearer; and at once he guessed their meaning. Without a word of inquiry, the Wazir had turned the soldiers loose to revenge themselves in their own rough fashion.

Pottinger shouted for his own men. They appeared forthwith; the two faint-hearted ones in obvious distress.

"Oh, Sahib, consider if it was well even for your Honour to anger the Sirdar." Tāj Mahomed ventured, palm set to palm. "The soldier-*lōg* are stirring up the people. They are entering your Honour's courtyard, doubtless to plunder our houses and dishonour our women."

"Why is the courtyard left empty?" Pottinger broke in sharply. "Where are the rest of my people?"

"Save for ourselves and two others, all are gone to the bazaar. *Hazúr*, what remains to be done?"

"Bar the doors and await the issue. I have many well-wishers among the people and the merchants."

Pottinger spoke quietly, not without a shade of bitterness. Inaction was the crowning misery of an anxious situation. But resistance were worse than folly.

Suddenly the door of his inner room was flung open; and swinging round, he discovered Allah Dad Khan, breathless from his flight through the streets.

"Praise God your Honour is safe!" he panted. "All

who were with me have been seized by the men of the Wazir. I, alone, fled in secret through a friend's house." Prostrating himself, he saluted his master's foot. "*Hazúr*—what is this evil that hath fallen like a stone out of the sky?"

A loud, hurried knocking at the main door interrupted him; and a babel of sound announced that the courtyard was in possession of the enemy.

"Who is it that knocks?" cried Pottinger.

"Syud Mahomed Alayar and three friends," came the welcome answer. Then Pottinger unbarred the door, and let in four Syuds from the valley of Pishin—holy men, not to be rashly set at naught even by the lawless soldiery of Yar Mahomed Khan.

Fervent embraces ensued and protestations of devotion. Pottinger briefly accounted for the upheaval; and Syud Mahomed nodded approval.

"You did well indeed, my friend. We heard that there had been high words between yourself and the Sirdar; and straightway we came here, to remain till this madness be past. If there be any service we may render, speak only. It is done. We will all be put to the sword before any man shall lay hands upon your honourable self."

"Syud Sahib, I believe you, and I thank you from my heart," Pottinger answered simply. Personal risk, as such, concerned him little, if at all. But the sincere attachment of these good men moved him to the depths. "Should matters become serious, it will not be the first time I have owed my safety to a Syud of Pishin! What think you? Will they encourage a tumult among the people?"

"That never!" the Syud declared stoutly. "Yar Mahomed hath enough of shrewdness to know that were

beyond even *his* power to achieve. Heard you not of his answer to the Persian emissary last week? 'How can we turn this man out,' said he, 'when he is giving us all things, even feeding our beggars; and has made every person in Herāt his own?'"

Pottinger smiled. "A cunning answer, worthy of him who made it. But if ever Irān sent more than promises, no such scruple would restrain him. And now—since there is nothing to be done, let us refresh ourselves and wait upon events."

Bowls of tea, with *chupattis* and curds, were set before each guest; while the talk turned mainly on the upward march of the British army, which it was believed would have a profound effect, not merely on Afghanistan, but on the whole of Central Asia.

The tumult waxed and waned fitfully till near sunset. Then the voice of Shere Mahomed was heard issuing peremptory orders. Followed a renewed knocking on the outer door.

To his call "Who is it?" came the reply: "One that brings explanation from the Wazir."

The voice was the voice of Shere Mahomed, and Pottinger smiled at his speedy return to the scene of discomfiture. As for the explanation, he already knew it by heart. When he would have risen, Syud Mahomed put out a detaining hand.

"Not yet, my friend. I will go out to hear his message and speak my own mind. Then I return, bringing you word."

The word he brought, after a heated parley, was couched in terms that grew stale with repetition. Yar Mahomed, of course, was in no way responsible. His men, hearing a rumour that payment would be denied, had rushed forth to plunder the Feringhi's house. Only now had

the disgraceful affair come to their master's knowledge. He had sent his brother to drive off the marauders and leave word that reparation would be made.

"As for Shere Mahomed," the Syud concluded, "when I reproached him for that disgraceful epithet, he exclaimed in surprise that you must have misconstrued his meaning. He now swears, by all the names of God, that the expression was applied to *himself*; and the Khans assert that it seemed so to them at the time. What would you have?"

The scorn in his eyes was reflected in Pottinger's.

"If I misjudged him, I will apologise," he answered, amused at the politic change of front. "But the Sirdar being little given to self-deprecation, I may be excused for my lack of understanding. He has dismissed the Wazir's men?"

"So he said."

And so it was; but he had replaced them by a strong guard of his own. Except that none dare hinder the Syuds from going out and in, Pottinger would have found himself in polite confinement. For, in the East, saintliness is a more practical asset than anywhere else on earth. So the holy men went and came again, bringing their mats for sleeping and all necessaries for the evening meal.

But for the significant fact of detention, the outburst appeared to have calmed down; and when, after dark, the voice of a relation was heard calling Tāj Mahomed to the door, the man—without hesitation—opened it and looked forth.

Instantly his arm was seized, the hand that clung to the lintel cut off at a blow, and he was dragged screaming into the night.

At his first yell of terror, Pottinger leapt forward with blazing eyes, followed by two of his escort. But as the

door slammed, he checked himself with a muttered oath, and the Syud, rising also, laid a hand upon his arm.

"My friend, to attempt a rescue is to set foot in an open trap, and play the game of Shere Mahomed Khan."

Pottinger nodded reluctant assent. "It would lead to actual fighting. And they might make that the signal for a general massacre?"

"Without doubt such is the thought of their hearts."

The Irishman let out his breath in a sigh of exasperation, and restrained his excited men.

"The Syud Sahib speaks wisdom. There is nothing to gain by impatience. Let all the doors be secured, and we will abide the issue of the morrow."

12

Morning brought his old friend Mirza Ibrahim, steeped to the lips in apology and abasement.

The seizure and mutilation of Tāj Mahomed lent a more serious aspect to the affair; and if the man were not honestly ashamed, he was honestly fearful of results. But Pottinger, in no mood for sounding brass and tinkling cymbals, sent back word that he required first to know the meaning of such barbarous and inhospitable conduct.

"If, in any respect, I have done wrong," said he, "it was due to my services, if not to my Government, that some inquiry should have been made. As for the Sirdar, I accept the word of his followers that the abusive epithet referred only to himself. For apology, I will send him a dress of honour. And I will pay your men, regardless of their deserts. In return I only ask leave to depart from your city."

But, as usual, this was the last request Yar Mahomed would grant. Apology, promises, reparation could always be had for the asking. Shere Mahomed came to proffer them; to entreat that Pottinger would meet his old friend and ally at the Sirdar's house that same evening. All this denoted a wholesome fear of British retribution; and Pottinger, bidden to keep the peace at any price, decided to accept the change of front for what it was worth.

The meeting passed off without friction. For once, Yar Mahomed's alarm was genuine. So, personally, Pottinger forgave all that had passed. He would ask Government to overlook the insult and mutilation of his servant. But he urged the Shah to send an official apology, to present Tāj Mahomed with a dress of honour and a grant of land; to restore plundered properties and punish the plunderers. Finally he decreed that the Wazir, with all the Herāt chiefs, should escort him to the city and publicly install him at the Pae-i-Takht; that the people who had seen him set at naught might see him re-established by those responsible for the tumult.

It was an elaborate programme; but Pottinger now knew his noble allies well enough to apply boldly the sole means of holding them in check. If this first attempt at open violence were not dealt with publicly and decisively, his position would become impossible; and he fully expected that his own Government would support him by a formal censure of Yar Mahomed's whole conduct since the siege was raised.

For the present, thanks to his own promptness and the support of the Syuds, his victory was complete; his personal prestige undamaged by a bolt from the blue that, irresolutely met, might have ruined all. But an outbreak so uncalled-for increased Pottinger's conviction

that, without military support of some kind, the foothold of Britain in Herāt would never be made secure. From every side came rumours of unrest. Mahomed Shah renewed his preparations for return ; and the eyes of all looked southward for the coming of that formidable army which alone had power to restore law and order in the land.

Much of this Pottinger set forth in a letter to Macnaghten, together with a straightforward account of the late disturbance ; neither glossing over nor excusing his own outburst of temper, which had brought matters to a climax. He strongly advocated pushing on a brigade from Kandahar, when that city had been occupied or invested : adding, in conclusion : " I hope you will not consider my offering advice officious. I feel encouraged to do so by being on the spot and seeing the eyes of every person turned on us : I mean with regard to the advance of our troops. I have not had any letters from India since the 12th of January, and no intelligence at all from Sir John McNeill. Kohundil Khan still persists in keeping the Kandahar road blockaded, and for fifteen days not a soul has arrived from that place. If grain does not soon come in, the state of this place will be dreadful ; and I, for want of confidential aid, can do nothing."

Before this letter could be dispatched, a heavy snowfall conspired with unfriendly chiefs to make the lonely man's isolation still more complete. But within the walls there remained, as always, much to be done, much to contend against. For armed neutrality implied no respite from the system of secret espionage that hampered his every act and word. He scarcely dared engage a servant, lest he should be taking into his household some paid creature of the Wazir ; and even when all seemed quietest,

he knew himself to be living on the edge of a crater by no means extinct. Nor could he ever guess from morning to morning what new exigencies or unexpected demands the day might bring forth. With little knowledge of Government intentions, with no political experience, and none to lighten the burden of work and responsibility, he must somehow contrive to keep on friendly terms with Afghan chiefs, increasingly suspicious of British designs on their country; must furnish Government with long and detailed reports; feed the starving; contend with threatened return of famine; and dispense rough justice in person at the Pae-i-Takht.

Among his manifold responsibilities was none more complex, more harassing, than that of handling Government money and securing it against theft. He could keep hidden in his quarters only just enough gold to meet any sudden demand. Any other sums he possessed were scattered among various *soukars*,[1] so that even they might not be able to guess the total amount. Only with his good friends the Syuds of Pishin he dealt openly in his own person, alike from policy and gratitude.

This constant undercurrent of enmity, involving constant vigilance, the meeting of guile with guile, defeated all attempts at regular office work or the keeping of clear detailed accounts, which must by some means be supplied. Impossible, at the time, to do more than keep a secret record of the bills drawn month by month to defray the price of friendship with Yar Mahomed Khan—at his own figure. It is an ill-sounding policy; but, put it how we may, the friendship of chiefs beyond the Indian Border is frankly a matter of bribery; though subsidy has the more becoming sound. Kashmir, Burma, Afghanistan, all are, or were, "priced," so to speak, according to their

[1] Bankers.

political importance; and in 1839—though the value of Herāt was exaggerated—Yar Mahomed Khan was the most able and powerful figure in Central Asia, not even excepting the Afghan Amir. British anxiety for his goodwill being obvious enough, he was not likely to sell his treasure for a song. And if the cost seemed excessive —as indeed it was—after events proved that the fault lay with the policy rather than with the man.

Pottinger, bidden to keep the peace at any price, could only give and give as occasion required—and hope for the ultimate best. Enough for the day was the demand thereof: and his evenings were chiefly devoted to a Pushtu version of the New Testament: a task purely restful and refreshing after the day's harassing duties and interruptions.

As the month drew to an end he began to look eagerly for Lord Auckland's remonstrance on the graceless treatment of his representatives in October: remonstrance that Pottinger counted on to strengthen his own hand and curb the arrogance of Yar Mahomed Khan. This last was rendered the more imperative by rumours of a secret coalition between Persia, Herāt and the local chiefs to oppose Shah Shujah's return to the throne. Feasible or no, it served to reveal which way the wind blew, and to increase Pottinger's anxiety for that decisive Government support which Macnaghten's letter must surely contain.

13

He was not kept waiting over-long. On the 13th of March it came.

Eagerly Pottinger broke the red seal. But before his eyes had scanned the first few paragraphs hope gave

place to incredulous surprise, and that in turn to bitter mortification, as conviction grew upon him that, beneath the courteous formalities of officialdom, lay a definite note of disapproval amounting to blame; regardless of the fact that the principals in the quarrel had been Colonel Stoddart and Yar Mahomed Khan. In addition he found conciliatory enclosures to the address of Shah Kamrān and his Wazir; and it needed but this to make his sense of humiliation complete.

Impossible for the man of theory sitting at ease in his office chair, a thousand miles away, to realise the effect of his own passing annoyance on the man of action, who has striven and endured, month after month, in the certain hope that his efforts will be recognised, his position upheld. To Eldred Pottinger, who had fronted danger, sickness, privation undismayed, this last unkindest cut seemed harder to bear than all that had gone before.

The actual text of that disheartening letter has not survived, but the gist of it may be inferred from Pottinger's reply, written two days later, when the ferment of brain and heart had sufficiently cooled down to admit of some attempt at self-justification—futile no doubt. But it was not in human nature to keep silence under a dual infliction that he could not but regard as at once impolitic and undeserved.

Far on into the night he wrote, and re-wrote, till he had achieved the rough copy as it still stands in the slim native book containing his official letters of that year. Then the fair copy was begun—

"My dear Sir,

"I had the pleasure to receive your letter of the 2nd of February, the night before last."—The ironic formality raised the ghost of a smile.—"But

it was with the greatest pain and mortification I gathered from it that his Lordship the Governor-General, and yourself, disapproved of my conduct and considered it indiscreet and untimely. With respect to the remarks you have made on my interference with the internal affairs of this place (and from which, as you rightly conjecture, all the difficulties arose) it was by the express desire, solicitation and even entreaty of the authorities themselves. The people, perfectly ruined by the calamities of the siege, tyrannised over by lawless followers and fearing a famine, were preparing for flight. The authorities were well aware of their unpopularity and unfaithfulness, and knew they had no chance of preventing complete desertion of the country but by procuring us to guarantee justice and good faith.

"I was also aware of this state of things, and agreed to guarantee their promises. The good effect of this was immediately seen; but the authorities from want (as they alleged) were not able to keep them; nor I to meet their demands for money. I had no idea of the intention of Government regarding this country; and the conduct, demands and expectations of its rulers left me no hope that we could ever live quietly in alliance with or support of them. So, in the absence of instructions, I had to keep to general promises, of the British Government supporting them as long as they acted in conformity with justice and our wishes. I particularly stood on the point of slavery, as it gave at any time a sufficient cause to break with them; while it is universally execrated by all people except those attached to the present ruler. . . .

"My interference was strictly confined to urging

the authorities to keep their promises, and from the engagements I had guaranteed I had no course left but that which placed me in opposition to the authorities and led to the estrangement.

"With respect to the people it is universally wished that we should occupy these countries for ourselves, and believed that we will do so. All my language to the contrary is of no use. As to the alarm it would create, the advance of our army is believed by every one to be for our own sakes, and that Shah Shujah is merely used as a name to cover our aggression. You will now be received with as great, and I think greater, opposition than if you had not brought the Shah. . . .

"I observe by your letter to Yar Mahomed Khan that you have requested him to send a trustworthy person to meet and treat with you at Kandahar. I have frequently urged him to send an envoy to India, to acknowledge his obligation to the Government, and he has put it off till now; but on receiving your letter he has made up his mind to send the Topshi Bāshi, Naju Khan, who is his firmest adherent and, indeed, the only man of sense about him, though he is shrewd, avaricious and fond of the bottle.

"If any of my acts here appear indiscreet or unconciliatory I beg to point out that I was, on account of the guarantee given, obliged to make as public as possible my disapproval and disallowance of Yar Mahomed's acts, for the sake of preserving our reputation for good faith. Being at such a distance from instructions, if I had waited till Government expressed its displeasure at the Herāti's breach of faith, our character would have been sullied for integrity and uprightness; which, at this time, I

consider of far greater importance than conciliating two or three unpopular chiefs. And I flatter myself you will find, on inquiry, that I have left no means untried to preserve the good wishes of the Afghans in general. Grain and a small movable force are absolutely necessary here. I beg, however, that you will not arrange anything regarding this place at Kandahar; but, if possible, visit this yourself. For I think that unless you do so my conduct may be liable to misconception; as it is impossible to describe the state of the country or the conduct of its rulers.

"Unexperienced as I am in affairs of Government, I trust that, for my guidance in future, I may have the benefit of your personal instructions; that in judging my past conduct you will favour me by reviewing it on the spot; bearing in mind that I was totally without instructions, or even information as to the intentions of Government, while the people with whom I was situated were strangers to probity and humanity.

"The Persians still occupy Ghoriān, and as long as it remains in their hands the people here remain insecure and doubtful. They are still prosecuting their intrigues . . . and if we do not aid them they will and must throw themselves on some Government that will."

After all that, nothing remained but to lull disappointment and pain by renewed endeavour, though his confidence was shaken and his sanguine spirit clouded as never yet.

Happily the same *Kāsid* had brought personal letters to cheer him and distract his thoughts. They were the first that had come to hand since the middle of January,

and to them he reverted thankfully so soon as the unpalatable "official" could be dismissed from his mind.

Goodly budgets of news from his Uncles Henry and William—a Major stationed at Bombay—and a close-written, characteristic effusion from his brother Tom, a lad of lively intelligence, no little promise and a very sustaining belief in himself. Judging from occasional letters, both he and John were like to become soldiers of energy and ability; cleverer, in many respects, and endowed with a keener eye for practical advantages than their distinguished brother. His strain of idealism gave them, no doubt, a vague, pleasant sense of superiority in worldly wisdom, dearly though they loved him, and keenly as they relished his sudden leap into fame. Tom wrote from Delhi, where he was stationed with his regiment, the 54th Native Infantry; and his artless, practical suggestions for prompt self-advertisement must have set his brother smiling in spite of a saddened spirit.

"My dear Eldred," it ran,

"I have intended writing to you for some time, but your movements have been so variously reported by the newspapers that I send this as a sort of random shot. . . .

"John mentions that my father entertains some wild scheme of coming to Bombay as agent for the Asphalt Association, which is some damned Speculation for covering roads with Asphalt, etc. . . . They pretend to offer my father £600 a year; but on his having gone to the expense and trouble of the voyage to India, I suspect he will find that the bubble has burst, and he allowed to return at his own leisure and expense! His inducement for doing so is that he had given up the rents of the Kilmore estate for three

years for the purpose of purchasing it out, which will be a great advantage to you, as the property in some years will be, I believe, very valuable.

"In the meantime my father has little or nothing to live on, and has been trying without success to get some Government appointment. But as this is a Speculation I really believe he would rather have it than a certainty. It is a most extraordinary thing that a man of such splendid talents and excellent sense should be so easily gulled by every fool or knave he comes across; and although never successful in any undertaking (and I have known a dozen at least) he is as sanguine of this succeeding as if he had never miscarried in any. I intend writing to him, strongly advising him to have nothing to say to any Speculation; but he is so well aware that I hate the name of one even, that I am afraid he will not pay much attention to me, for which reason I wish you would also write to the same effect.

"I am delighted to hear of your success at Herāt, and trust that you will be able to restore our family to its proper station. Save all cash you can and get back, if possible, the 'dirty acres'; as in these days family honour, or anything else, is a mere name without money; and at home, were you another Sir Isaac Newton or a Napoleon, without cash, you would be looked on as inferior to a grocer with money. So save what you can and buy back the estates. Above all do not be fool enough to marry!

"Another thing you ought to do immediately is to write an account of the siege of Herāt, etc., etc., interlarded with something of the views of the Russians, North American Indians, etc., etc.,—or *anything* upon British India. It will be sure to take;

and you may depend there is no getting on without appearing in print. Look at that humbug, Sir A. Burnes, for instance ; a fellow who by all accounts is much fitter for a Grub Street author than anything else. What has he done, even as a traveller, compared to you ? And yet if you do not *publish*, you may wait a thousand years and you will not be rewarded like him. The great thing is to bring yourself into notice at Home. This has always been the mistake of our family : we've always been contented with our own actions without making every one else acquainted with them, and what has been the consequence ?

" Let me advise you seriously to write—if it be only a pamphlet—and publish it in London, after advertising it in every paper in Great Britain and Ireland ! You will then become celebrated, and that is all a man requires to get on. Depend upon it, the time and money will be well spent. But do it *immediately*, as the Indian and Russian fever seems strong at home at present ; but in the course of six months some person who stands on his head, or speaks the unknown tongues, or animal magnetism, or some other nonsense will be the rage. . . .

" I wrote to Mr. Macnaghten, to whom I brought out letters, asking him to obtain leave for me to join the Army of the Indus ; and the other day received an answer, saying that until I had served my two years it would be impossible to do so ; but that then the Government, on my uncle's and on your account, would be most favourably disposed towards me and that he would assist me in any way in his power. What a pity I did not enter the service five years sooner. This is a tolerably long letter considering

the chances there are against its ever reaching you. Write soon, and believe me,

"Your affectionate brother,

"THOMAS POTTINGER."

Needless to add that the sagacious advice, tendered in all seriousness, was ignored. A geographical record of his journey he fully hoped to achieve; but that descriptive pamphlet of the siege was never written, nor thought upon by the hero of the defence. It remained for Major Todd to enlighten Government, and Sir John Kaye to enlighten England, as to the full extent of Eldred Pottinger's gallantry and zeal. But if he ignored his brother's advice, he did not fail to bear in mind his desire for active service: a desire tragically fulfilled.

The letter from Major William Pottinger was in much the same cheerful vein as that of his nephew, and expressed the same hope of future publication.

"It would be useless for me to add my mite to what has been so forcibly expressed by the Governor-General; but I trust . . . we shall one day have a full account of all your travels and operations, from your first setting out from Bhuj up to the day on which the Persians raised the siege of *your city*!"

For the rest, personalities, local gossip, giving a glimpse of social Bombay in '39—the ride at dusk, the palanquin at noon, the jealousies and criticisms engendered by the last list of C.B.'s; the "gentle and amiable" young ladies of the station, on whom Major Pottinger dilated for the benefit of his banished nephew.

"The chief beauties here are Miss Voyle, a great pet of Mrs. Pottinger's, and a Miss Hewitt, whom Ensign Montague saved from destruction last Evening when her Horse ran away with her. They are both little angels; I

wish you had either of them (lawfully, of course) to solace you at Herāt."

And did Eldred Pottinger, in his loneliness, echo that wish? Did it stir a sleeping memory, or lure him, even for an hour, from the harassment of Afghan politics, to unformed visions of a future shared with the one woman who should enrich and complete him by possessing all the gracious elements he conspicuously lacked?

No trace in letters or journals, and little revelation, anywhere, of his attitude to the heart's divine folly. His aloofness from the few women with whom he was thrown in contact after the Afghan War, may have been less a matter of temperament than of habit, engendered by long absence from their influence. Small likelihood, in any case, that his brothers would ever see him "spliced to a fortune"!

Cheered by that brief excursion to Ireland and India, he returned once more to his ineffectual striving against conditions too hideous to be depicted in words. And now to veiled Afghan antagonism was added the disheartening conviction that his own Government could neither appreciate his difficulties, nor realise the futility of hoping to check abuses by gaining "the confidence and co-operation" of a Yar Mahomed Khan.

14

"Allah Dad!"

"*Hazúr.*"

"Bring pen and paper, and another cushion for my shoulders. I must write."

"*Nahin, Hazúr.* Your Honour cannot hold the pen."

The faithful soldier kneeled, in speaking, by the mat

where his master had lain, for near two weeks, rolled in a cotton quilt, burning and shivering by turns; refusing all nourishment but tea and milk tinctured with quinine. These had at last wrought some improvement, Pottinger's brain was clear; and another letter from Macnaghten demanded acknowledgment, and by a determined effort of will no doubt the thing could be done; the need for insistence angered him.

"Since when hast thou presumed to disobey my orders, Allah Dad? Bring what I need; also the packet on my table or I fetch them myself."

The voice was weak and husky; but the note of command was there.

The implements were brought, and Pottinger, extracting Macnaghten's letter, succeeded in refreshing his blurred recollection of its contents. The secretary's annoyance had blown over: and he could not be expected to realise its disheartening effect on a man tired out, in brain and body, by eighteen months of such severe strain on both, as Macnaghten himself, in all his twenty-five years of desk work, had never known. He now wrote with his wonted complacence. He had little doubt that all his assistant's primary arrangements were judicious. In regard to payments made and contemplated, he placed great reliance on Pottinger's discretion, assuring him that the Governor-General would "gladly sanction the expenditure of any sum necessary to the security of his position, the frustration of hostile intrigues, and the maintenance of friendship with the authorities of Herāt." Yet it was Pottinger who was afterwards criticised for having accustomed the Herāt authorities to do nothing without being exorbitantly paid for the exertion.

But for the moment friction was in abeyance; and

Macnaghten in a gracious mood. "On this side," he concluded cheerfully, "everything promises well for the success of our cause. The first column of the Bengal Army marches on the Bolān Pass to-morrow morning. I have most confident expectations that the approach of His Majesty will be cordially and generally welcomed, and that in the recovery of his throne he will meet with little or no opposition. . . ."

It will soon be seen how slender were the grounds for these expectations. But they served to hearten a sick man nerving himself to an effort beyond his strength. Allah Dad Khan was right. A few lines of formal acknowledgment was the utmost that will-power could achieve: and for many days to come there could be no further question of wielding a pen.

Throughout April convalescence was slow and intermittent. Outside on the plain, blossoms multiplied; and the fields, reclaimed by Pottinger's relief-works, were green with young corn. But in the windowless houses of the city, heat was already the arch-enemy, hindering the sick man's return to normal health.

Happily, surface quiet prevailed. Pottinger's arrangements for dispensing justice and mercy were by this time in fair working order: while Yar Mahomed carried on his secret intercourse with Persia unhampered by irksome supervision. Possibly this welcome respite, and the fact of Pottinger's illness, induced a rare mood of gratitude for his services. During April he achieved a long letter to Government, reviewing in Bombastes' vein the chief events of the siege; extolling Afghan heroism and concluding with a tribute to his subaltern ally embroidered with flourishes peculiarly his own.

"Though Lieutenant Pottinger did not at once declare himself—having no office under Government—yet never

did his courage and resolution relax. He, taking himself to the craggy fissures of breaches, was present at every onset; drawing not his foot from the path of valour. Whatever we did in that long period, was done as he thought good; even until that last and greatest assault, when the dagger of the stout-hearted Afghan pierced the breast of the enemy and their sword was mowing down the head of the haughty; when the edge of the breach and the ditch was muddy with blood, and on all sides buttresses of slime were raised against the walls. So that again and again the Persians demanded one thing only, the dismissal of Lieutenant Pottinger from the town. So great has been the suffering since then, that even the sublime aforesaid lord could not put right the distracted affairs of the country. For this reason we are constantly arguing with him, though through no fault of our own: because every time hunger pinches us then we are hard on him."

A masterly perversion of the truth, this last; fitly capped by a modest reminder of his own "constant services and anxious efforts towards the victorious Government; looking that it should provide its loyal adherent with distinction and favour beyond bounds." In the face of effusions so plausible, a British envoy, wholly ignorant of Afghan character, may well have felt justified in cherishing delusive hopes; while Pottinger's strictures on the loyal adherent's conduct would appear, by contrast, prejudiced, if not unjust.

But at that time Yar Mahomed and his intrigues were thrust into the background of Macnaghten's mind by the exigencies, anxieties and delays of that arduous upward march through countries friendly in theory, bitterly hostile in fact. At the time of writing, he and

his Shah still languished at Shikarpore, vainly demanding carriage-cattle to help them forward. On the 20th they were cheered by the arrival of the entire Bengal Army under Sir Willoughby Cotton : but camels——? That was another pair of sleeves. The General, straitened for transport, was quick to resent "civil interference," even of the mildest. It was a case of two cocks in a hen-run. Both men eyed each other with secret suspicion ; and the outcome was a stormy interview in Sir Willoughby's tent, followed by a lamentable screed from Macnaghten to his late fellow-secretary, John Colvin.

"Sir W.," he complained, "is evidently disposed to look on His Majesty, his troops and myself as mere cyphers. Any hint from me, however modestly given, was received with hauteur. I was told that I wanted to assume command of the army—that he, Sir W., knew no superior but Sir John Keane, etc., etc. . . . All this arose out of my requesting a thousand camels for the use of the Shah and his force. . . ."

Thus, at the first close contact, was struck that jarring chord of civil and military dissonance which was to be dominant throughout. But Macnaghten, by temperament, as by calling, was a man of peace. He was determined not to lose his temper ; and the two parted, at a late hour, very good friends.

During the three days' halt, Sir Willoughby and his travel-weary troops were zealous in entertaining His Majesty with reviews and parades : but the Shah himself —stout and thickset, his beard dyed black, his unpleasant face devoid of intelligence or power—made no favourable impression on those bound over to espouse his cause.

On the 23rd, the army moved on—camels included : eighty thousand souls, of whom but fifteen thousand were fighting men—all dependent on an inefficient commissariat

for food. It seems incredible that "no attempt was made to limit the numbers of an embarrassing rabble or diminish the lumbering baggage of the force." Ignorant and unprovided for, they went forth into the desert, leaving the royal contingent to await Sir John Keane, now raised to supreme command by the retirement of Sir Henry Fane. Ill-health and frank disapproval had induced the resignation of that consummate soldier, to the sincere regret of all ranks: and in losing him, the army lost a master-spirit.

By the time that Macnaghten thankfully turned his back on the arid desolation of Shikarpore, Cotton was nearing the far-famed Bolān Pass, after two weeks of disastrous marching through a desert empty of forage.

Throughout that fortnight the troops had paid heavy toll in suffering, and in loss of baggage-cattle, for Macnaghten's lack of foresight at Shikarpore. Horses grew weaker daily; camels, underfed and shamefully overladen, fell exhausted by the way, and were left to die—unharnessed. The Baluch marauders must have had a joyful time: more joyful still when the unwieldy mass became entangled in the defiles of the Pass.

For sixty miles that stout-hearted army toiled and encamped, and toiled again, among rocks and boulders and sharp flints, fording and re-fording the river, which had carven for itself and them a rugged pathway through the barrier that walls in south-west Afghanistan. Thirteen times one day, eighteen times the next, did the straggling column splash and scramble through rushing water, so deep in places that a tall horse could hardly keep his legs. And the way they went was strewn with abandoned tents, ammunition, stores and camels—always camels, till the stream of the Bolān was tainted, and men began to realise the worth of that most maddening, most

invaluable aid to invasion. And as if loss by misadventure were not enough, came urgent demands from Keane for camels and again more camels to relieve his own wretched plight.

Too soon also it became known that Burnes—absent on a mission of persuasion at Khelāt—had failed to convince the shrewd and vigorous old Khan that it was his duty to acknowledge Shah Shujah and smooth the way for his supporters, who had wrought devastation by their presence in a land already suffering from a blighted harvest.

"He should have trusted to Afghans," the old chief declared sagely, "instead of deluging the country with Hindustanis; an insult his own people will never forgive him. You English may place him by force upon the *Masnad* [1]; but as soon as you leave the kingdom, he will be driven beyond its borders."

In fine, Mehrāb Khan cancelled the hated treaty and refused supplies; leaving Macnaghten to charm away, as best he might, the Royal Pretender's increasing disgust with the men of his own race. Sick of delays, dissensions and discomfort, Shah Shujah already seemed not merely undesired, but undesirous. "He says he never had so much trouble and bother in his lifetime," wrote Macnaghten to Lord Auckland; "and his opinion of the Afghan nation is, I regret to say, extremely low. . . . He declares they are a pack of dogs . . . but we must try and win him round to a more favourable opinion of his subjects."

The element of farce in this anomalous state of things had surely been obvious to any man salted with a grain of humour: but Macnaghten was blest with little or none of that saving grace which clarifies judgment and keeps

[1] Throne.

its balance true. While at Bagh, his fears of Persia were revived by Pottinger's candid account of his second —and last—collision with the virtual rulers of Herāt. Haunted still by the bogy of Russo-Persian advance, he exaggerated the significance of a purely local disturbance. In spite of Pottinger's postscript showing how speedily his decisive measures had cleared the air, the whole account was forwarded to Calcutta, adorned with his own views and comments. The tenor of these may be gathered from his letter to Pottinger, written in the first flush of vexation and dismay—

"My dear Sir,

"I will not attempt to describe to you the extreme concern I have felt at learning this fresh misunderstanding between yourself and the Herāt authorities; and I am not without apprehension that the Governor-General will receive your own statement of the affair with much of uneasiness. You have related the occurrences with evident candour and fairness; and I trust that his Lordship will be prepared to make every allowance for the peculiarly difficult nature of your position at this distance from the scene of your employment. I can only recommend you in the most urgent manner to remember that the interests of your country are at stake; and I would strongly advise you, whenever practicable, to leave every point of difference to be adjusted between myself and the Herāt authorities."

(On this master-stroke of advice comment is superfluous.)

"You know how much I labour under the apprehension that you are interfering too minutely in the domestic affairs of the Herāt Government. Nothing is more likely than this to alienate the attachment of the Authorities; . . . but you will, I hope, be able to prevail upon Kamrān

and Yar Mahomed to send confidential agents on their part to meet us at Kandahar. At that place I do not expect any opposition. . . . You will observe that I have not entered into any detailed investigation of your proceedings. When matters of such vast importance are pending, a retrospect is comparatively useless ; and I feel assured that you will now strain every nerve to make secure your present position, at least until our approach."

To this letter no definite reply is on record. Pottinger was still unwell when it reached him : and all that he chose to say for himself had already been said in his one exhaustive attempt at explaining the situation to men incapable of perceiving its essential impossibility. And if Pottinger suffered on that account, Macnaghten, in his own degree, suffered also. He knew neither the people he designed to benefit, nor the king he thrust upon them at the point of the bayonet : and his dream of a conciliated and co-operating Yar Mahomed Khan was " an unconscionable time a-dying."

Till it died, Pottinger must endure the implication that it was he, and not the Wazir, who impeded " more intimate relations " with Herāt.

15

On March the 27th, Cotton and his troops emerged, at last, into the beautiful valley of Shāl, alive at this season with familiar sights and sounds of an English spring—fruit-blossoms, wild anemones, iris and tulips ; buttercups, even, and the jubilation of larks. On the following day " headquarters " were established at Quetta—now one of India's finest frontier stations ; then " a most

miserable mud town with a small castle on a mound, and a small gun on a rickety carriage." Here arrangements were made for an ill-judged halt of eleven days to suit the plans of Keane. Fifty miles on, another pass of unknown difficulty awaited them ; yet it never occurred to Cotton that some sort of reconnaissance in that direction would have given occupation to the officers, and mitigated the evil of delay. To the chiefs at Kandahar that delay implied timidity ; and its ill-effect on the *morale* of all ranks was inevitable.

On April the 6th, the arrival at Quetta of King, Envoy and Commander-in-Chief was celebrated with all honour : peals of ordnance, flourish of trumpets, glitter of bayonets and uniforms. For one while, at least, there was no more talk of delay. Two hours later all heads of departments met in Sir Willoughby's tent ; and afternoon brought the welcome order that the combined forces would march next morning for Kandahar. But it was thought advisable that a brigade remain at Quetta to hold the province of Shāl and keep communications open in the rear. For this irksome but necessary duty Keane told off the 2nd Brigade under Major-General Nott, of subsequent Kandahar fame : and thereby hangs a tale.

In that crowded theatre of action a score or so of names stand boldly out ; and among these was perhaps no finer leader, nor any more remarkable man than William Nott, the rugged old Company's officer and bereaved husband, whose chance of distinction had come too late.

Though barely fifty-six, he had served John Company with energy and devotion for over forty years. Uncompromising and straight-spoken to a fault, high-handed, warm-hearted, the very " abstract and impersonation of duty and justice," Nott was essentially a fighter ; while yet he was deep-sighted enough to recognise the truth that

"fighting is the least part of a soldier's duty." And this fiery, indomitable spirit was matched by a frame equal to any demand either for action or endurance. A commanding brow, and features ruggedly aquiline as those of the great Duke himself, were redeemed from hardness by a mouth more humanly passionate and generous, and finely-shaped eyes that glowed with a fire too vital to be quenched by even inconsolable grief, at loss of the wife he worshipped. So pronounced a personality could scarcely escape egotism; but in the main his faults were faults of temper. "He thought deeply, felt keenly; spoke and wrote with scorching vehemence"; for he was not of those who suffer fools gladly. A strict disciplinarian, yet merciful and considerate, he was better beloved by the men who served under him than by his brother officers or superiors. For he would flatter no man's vanity; and though his judgments were right in the main, an aggressive insistence on the fact tended to alienate sympathy or engender dislike.

At the time when Lord Auckland's proclamation stirred all India, there were those who considered Colonel Nott the finest regimental chief of his day; though his claim to distinction rested mainly on the fact that he had, without a murmur of opposition, restored the unsettled condition of three regiments by a simple course of justice and equity that will always reconcile brave men to discipline, however strict. But so deep-seated was the prejudice against him in high places that Fane had with difficulty insisted on promoting him to the rank of Major-General and command of a brigade. For which insistence, England had reason to be grateful in the years that followed.

Four days after the publication of the Afghan manifesto, Nott himself was stunned, in the midst of his

preparations, by the sudden death of the wife he had loved for three-and-thirty years, with a passionate, yet exalted devotion characteristic of the man. So sudden, so prostrating was the blow, that for a time light was turned to darkness. Promotion and chances of distinction were dust and ashes in his mouth now that she was no longer there to take a pride in them. Two unmarried daughters left on his hands added anxiety to his grief; while their need of him strung up his courage to face the prospect of living on alone.

Before leaving Delhi he sent them to join their elder brother in Calcutta, promising to take care of himself for their sakes. "But for you, all would be a blank, and I would turn back to-morrow if I could," he wrote after the parting. "I once anticipated pleasure from this expedition—now all is exquisite misery." But time, the merciful healer, deadened his pain. Action and change of scene helped also: though his sympathies, from the first, were not with the Puppet King. He stands out as one of the few Englishmen capable of seeing the whole affair from the Afghan point of view.

"I really believe," he wrote, "that the people of Afghanistan will *not* give up their country without fighting for it; *I know I would not were I in their situation.*"

From the first also he was strongly prepossessed in favour of the Afghans themselves. "Very fine-looking fellows," was his verdict; "I like them very much. . . ."

And as to the "grand promenade" he had nothing but praise for the Army itself; while adding with characteristic frankness, "The Government only made one blunder. On that fine soldier Sir Henry Fane giving up the command, they failed to give this beautiful force a competent leader! . . . Sir John Keane's appointment was a

'dirty job'; and it has nearly given the death-blow to our expedition."

Keane, a brave though not brilliant soldier, and a rough-mannered, prejudiced man, was also, it should be added, a Queen's officer; and Nott—prejudiced also—held the drastic opinion that no Queen's officer, whatever his talents, should hold high command in India. For himself, he had managed, by unstinted forethought and personal expenditure, to keep his troops and cattle in better condition than most; and now, arrived at Quetta, behold the heart-broken man—for whom action was the sole anodyne to grief—condemned to the inglorious rôle of *chokidar* while "Queen's Generals" went forward into the promised land.

Immediately on Keane's arrival at Quetta he presented himself, and stated his grievance. He was told that the Governor-General had ordered a whole brigade to garrison Quetta—which he did not believe.

Sir John pointed out that, by remaining with his brigade, the General would virtually command the entire province of Shāl.

The General retorted that he had no urgent desire to command that province. His only wish was to proceed with the army.

"Consider, your Excellency," he urged, with increasing warmth: "I am senior to all present except Sir Willoughby. It is natural I should feel the hardship and injustice of being left behind when all my juniors are going forward."

To which Sir John made answer bluntly, "I am sorry for your disappointment, but I can't help that."

Tone and manner suggested to Nott that he would not if he could. But so strongly his heart was set upon his soldierly purpose, that—after a stormy interview—he

proffered his resignation, simply in order to accompany the Army as a private gentleman.

At that, Keane stared in amazement. "I can only say, sir, that your conduct is most extraordinary."

He refused, of course, to accept that astounding resignation; and again he pleaded the receipt of "particular orders"; adding coldly, "If you think yourself aggrieved you can appeal to the Court of Directors. Evidently nothing *I* can say will convince you."

"No, your Excellency. Nothing you *have* yet said has been at all convincing."

"General Nott, you insult my authority!"

At that Nott rose to his feet, smouldering fire in his eyes. "I am not aware of having done anything of the kind. I have merely stated my unalterable judgment; and I trust I have left no ill impression on your mind by speaking the truth."

"Ill impression, sir! By Gad, I shall never forget your conduct as long as I live!"

Nott bowed ceremoniously and stepped back toward the door. "In that case, I have only to wish you a very good evening!"

For the moment there was no more to be said or done. But there was much to follow, as events will show.

Next day Sir John Keane marshalled his crippled forces and set out for Kandahar, leaving behind him a very inadequate protective force and his finest General smarting under a bitter sense of wrong. Not even the song of birds, the music of streams, the scent and colour of a thousand roses, had power to heal Nott's wounded spirit, or to curb his impatience at the needless suffering and loss inflicted on first-rate troops by sheer mismanagement in all directions.

On the 19th of April he addressed to the Governor-

General-in-Council his protest against unjust supersession, which must needs be sent *via* Sir John Keane.

Days grew to weeks, and weeks to months—during which time Nott had rewritten his protest three times. But the gods were silent : and inquiry brought always the same answer : "Not received."

Finally conviction was thrust upon him that even "in this very just world there are men who see no harm in 'burking' papers which are not exactly palatable!" Wrathful and resolute, he determined to break through the rules of the service : and writing yet another copy, he sent it direct to the fountain-head of justice.

But by that time the appeal would arrive too late to do him any good. Sir John Keane had gained his end.

16

In April, however, Keane had still to reach Kandahar and to marshal his hampered force through the Khojak Pass. No attempt had been made by Cotton to gauge its difficulties, or to discover an easier route ; and, as usual, the sins of the leaders were visited most heavily on the men and animals given into their charge. Opposition was conspicuous by its absence. So, also, were fresh water, forage and food. Day after day, strength and spirit were sapped by an invicible enemy at whom none could strike a straightforward blow.

But if Afghan chiefs were inactive, marauding tribes were not. Like a swarm of angry wasps they buzzed about the rear-guard, plundering camels and stores, murdering stragglers and generally enjoying themselves. Before Kandahar was reached twenty-seven thousand rounds of musket ammunition and much spare powder

had fallen into their hands : twenty thousand camels had died of hunger and merciless overloading ; and the plight of the horses was little less tragic. Before leaving Quetta, sixty horses had been shot ; the first week's march killed a hundred and sixteen more ; and few of those that survived could be ridden without brutality. By the time Kandahar was reached, the 3rd Cavalry, alone, was in good order and nearly complete.

But while each day of that last terrible three weeks seemed to increase the miseries of man and beast, each evening found them ten or twelve miles nearer to the end. Shah Shujah, himself, haunted by earlier unsuccessful adventures, plucked up heart when letters arrived by the hand of Pottinger's old friend Syud Mohun Shah, stating the terms on which the Barakzai brothers were prepared to submit. Macnaghten would have none of these ; and in spite of Afghan bluster, it seemed probable that the alternative to submission would be flight : a prospect calculated to cure the royal attack of nerves.

Now, for the first time, King and Envoy rode in the van : and, to Macnaghten's unbounded delight, they entered Kandahar escorted by a cheering, shouting populace, well in advance of Keane and his bedraggled army.

That last, after a waterless march of fifteen miles, cared nothing at all for Kandahar or kings. One thought was in the minds of all : " The river—the river ! " There was magic and torment in the very word. For a week and more, driblets of water, brackish or fœtid, had been their portion. Some, in their anguish, had thankfully swallowed liquid mud. And at sight of clear rushing water, neither self-control nor discipline could check the rush to the river's bank, the wild mêlee of men and animals, scrambling over each other in mad haste to find

relief; so that many fell, exhausted, and died in the very water that should have saved their lives.

But, for those that survived, the worst was over. Two more marches brought them to the south gate of Kandahar: and by the 4th of May Keane's entire army, except for one brigade, was encamped without the walls: a battered, ill-used army indeed; yet as fine a body of men as any leader could wish to command. Among the higher ranks more than a little incompetence might prevail: but, among the captains and subalterns, and the much-maligned politicals of that disastrous war, were men destined to win and mould the Punjab; not to mention a score of Mutiny heroes, whose names are written on India's scroll of honour. Outram and Havelock were there; the last as A.D.C. to Cotton. George Lawrence was there, a captain of Light Cavalry. Henry had already earned distinction by his exertions at Ferōzepore. He, too, as a budding political, was to be drawn into the vortex before the end came. Henry Durand, James Abbott, Nevil and Crawford Chamberlain all endured the hardships of that terrible march: and in '41, a subaltern named John Nicholson journeyed up with George Broadfoot's column, through the Khyber to Jalālabad.

The Army learnt on arrival that the Barakzais had retreated to a fort on the Herāt road, that Shah Shujah had been welcomed by his former subjects with "feelings amounting almost to adoration." Such was Macnaghten's gilded version of a short-lived curiosity and excitement—signifying nothing.

True, the Barakzai brothers at Kandahar had been far from popular; and, for the moment, any change was acceptable. But the longer they looked at the new King and his halo of bayonets the less, it seemed, did they

appreciate either. Yet Macnaghten could not, or would not see anything amiss ; and whatever the Shah's feelings may have been, they kept strict purdah behind his blank brow and supercilious eyes.

It soon became evident, even to Macnaghten, that the powerful Ghilzai tribe—lords of the land—had no mind to accept British overtures. Only the impoverished Durānis thronged about the throne demanding extravagant rewards for their supposed forbearance from opposition, bargaining for the revival of ancient privileges. Friendship of this complexion proved more embarrassing than Ghilzai hostility. For the awkward fact remained that although British guns had saluted Shah Shujah as King at Kandahar, Dōst Mahomed still ruled at Kābul. If his brothers were hated he was not ; and weeks of delay at Kandahar would give him ample time to concentrate troops at Ghazni. But on this one occasion, the possible stumbling-block proved instead the actual stepping-stone to a brief success. For Dōst Mahomed had been puzzled by unreliable rumours and by that unaccountable halt at Kandahar, from which he augured a preliminary advance on Herāt—and augured wrong, to his own destruction.

But for all the eagerness of officers and men, no instant hope of advance, in any direction, enlivened those monotonous weeks under canvas ; while heat increased and sickness increased also. Provisions were scarce, money still more so ; and an army without horses or camels was like a man without legs. There was plainly nothing to do but to await a more hopeful turn of the wheel : and in the interval Macnaghten's ever-active brain returned to the problem of Herāt.

Before the end of the month came an official letter from

Simla expressing "deep concern" at renewed friction with the authorities, and confirming his own opinion that an officer of higher standing should be sent to superintend affairs in that quarter. Lord Auckland bade him dispatch the highest in rank and most trusted political officer at his disposal to draw up a special report of the present dispositions and requirements of those semi-mythical monsters, Shah Kamrān and Yar Mahomed Khan.

Now the highest political at Macnaghten's disposal was Sir Alexander Burnes. But Sekunder the Great had no mind to thrust his ungloved hand into a hornets' nest. He was clever enough to foresee the fate of any upright Englishman who pitted himself against the Herāt Wazir; and to succeed Macnaghten at Kābul was the private wish of his heart. So he merely acknowledged the compliment and declined the offer, which devolved, by a natural sequence, on Major D'Arcy Todd, the former assistant of Sir John McNeill. Todd answered frankly that he was willing to do his utmost, but saw little chance of success. Engineer and artillery officers were to accompany him for the purpose of strengthening Herāt fortifications at British expense. In return for these favours, the authorities were expected to ratify the treaty of friendship and alliance whereon Macnaghten had set his heart. A plain-spoken letter from Pottinger, dated the 4th of May, might well have shaken the convictions of a man less securely armoured against the slings and arrows of discouraging facts.

"The Wazir's real aim," wrote the one man who could speak from intimate and painful experience, "is to get sufficient money to assume an independent attitude and then keep up the supply by threatening his neighbours. He has no idea of finance or of increasing the

prosperity of his country. . . . Even amongst Afghans he is an ambitious and engrossing man, and Kamrān nourishes the hope of possessing the whole kingdom of Ahmed Shah. If he were a man the Wazir feared, things might go well; but he is ten times the greater tyrant; and if Government does not wish to interfere in internal affairs, we can only restore justice and security by removing one or the other. Without a force, we only hold our situation here by the payment of money, which Kamrān and his Minister will use every means of falsehood and fraud to procure from us, while giving not a single iota to the general interest. With two such men and their followers, accustomed to live by rapine, you may judge what hope we have of restoring prosperity to this country. For my part—I have none."

Such uncomfortable convictions served only to increase Macnaghten's desire for the opinion of a man whose view of things more nearly squared with his own. This is not to say that his personal friend and Military Secretary was dispatched with intent to displace Pottinger; but there can be little doubt that Todd's presence at Herāt was intended for the thin end of the wedge. Lord Auckland's desire was that no Mission be sent till a deputation had been received from Yar Mahomed Khan; but Macnaghten still looked in vain for that cloud of dust on the Herāt road.

As a matter of fact Nazu Khan, Topshi Bāshi, had set out late in April; though the fall of Kandahar had stirred up very mixed feelings in that region, Yar Mahomed himself began to grow suspicious of England's ultimate intentions. Local chiefs were in a turmoil. Pottinger was beset with questions, to which he could seldom give accurate replies.

In his own words: "The more Government wrote of

their confidence in me, the more was expected from me; and my non-ability to answer their questions as to our intentions in Afghanistan roused suspicion of impending danger. After a great deal of trouble, I arranged that some of the more turbulent people should go with the king's son to acknowledge Shah Shujah; and I wrote to Mr. Macnaghten that I wanted them well treated, as I had chiefly got rid of them to allow me time to receive fuller instructions about the country. I begged that he would let me see him before deciding on any definite line of action. I also begged him to be specially cautious with the chiefs who had gone down, as they were very inimical to us. The Envoy, panic-stricken, stopped the party, and would not let it come on for some time; and eventually the answer I received to my requests was a copy of a treaty concluded between Sir William and the Topshi Bāshi, an unaccredited agent. This treaty, I was told, Major Todd had been appointed to bring here for ratification, under the title of Envoy."

With what feelings Eldred Pottinger read this astonishing communication may be judged from his sole recorded comment: "I immediately applied for leave of absence, intending to throw up the appointment."

For more than eighteen months he had done his utmost to promote England's interests, and—which is of far greater moment—to uphold her character for truth and justice against formidable odds: now, by way of recognition, he received a treaty drawn up without a word of reference to himself, in the face of his urgent and justifiable request to the contrary. As for the Mission, he could but await its arrival, and talk matters over with D'Arcy Todd, whose sympathetic and generous spirit could be relied upon to mitigate an unpleasant position.

Not until the 25th of June did the new Herāt Envoy,

with seven picked officers and two lakhs of treasure, set out from Kandahar. Todd was singularly blessed in the men chosen to accompany him: Captain Saunders, with three engineer subalterns, Edward Conolly, Abbott and North; Richmond Shakespear, then a subaltern of Artillery; Dr. Ritchie, and Dr. John Login, the last an Orkney man, already distinguished for remarkable talent, force of character and an insatiable appetite for work. An adventure of very uncertain issue lay before them; but all were men of courage, equal to any fortune, good or bad; and, before leaving, they were heartened by the knowledge that within a day or two Sir John Keane's army was to march on Kābul, taking Ghazni by the way.

Taking Ghazni—there was the rub.

Sir John, sick of enforced delays, had decided to advance with half rations, relying on the later harvest of the highlands to save the situation. More serious still; he had decided to dispense with his siege battering guns, and had almost accepted a bright suggestion from Macnaghten that difficulties of transport might be lessened by leaving all European troops at Kandahar. Between ignorance of the country and political domination, his position bristled with difficulties. For all he knew, Kābul and Ghazni had yet to be taken by assault or by siege. None had seen the last, save D'Arcy Todd and Leech—a sapper subaltern on political duty. Both described the most redoubtable fortress in the country as "a place of little strength"; while Macnaghten was ready to "stake his credit that not a shot would be fired in opposition to Shah Shujah's march on Kābul."

Happily for his own reputation and his country's prestige, Keane, in his perplexity, consulted with Captain Thompson of the Engineers, who looked grave at mention of Macnaghten's proposal.

"Whatever the strength of Ghazni," said he, "we know it is occupied in force. The son of Dōst Mahomed may be counted on to make a vigorous defence; and the ultimate responsibility is yours. Would failure be excused by the plea that you acted on political assurances and advice? Besides—has your Excellency, in any single instance, found political information to be correct?"

"Damned if I have!" the old soldier retorted. "Even if we must eat shoe-leather, the English troops shall go. But Stevenson swears the bullocks are totally unfit to drag the guns."

So the matter was settled; and Shah Shujah with his "escort" of four thousand three hundred fighting men began his triumphal march on Kābul. But the siege battering guns, which had been dragged, at enormous cost, over a thousand miles of country—more heart-breaking than any that lay ahead—were left, with an unconscious touch of irony, to ornament the tamely-surrendered city of Kandahar.

17

Those last critical weeks of June and July were not soon to be forgotten by Dōst Mahomed Khan, sometime friend of the English; now goaded into fierce hostility at sight of troops and money lavished on his thrice-beaten, thrice-accursed foe, who could not stand on his own feet one hour without support. A bitter comment on the cheap presents and lean diet of sympathy meted out to himself when he had begged a little support, a little recognition, in return for friendly alliance with England and England alone. Look where he would, troubles, that are by nature gregarious, buzzed about

him like a swarm of awakened bees. In place of friendship, enmity; in place of loyal support, treachery and rebellion. Even in Kābul disaffection grew and stirred. The Kazzilbashes of the Persian quarter were no longer reliable. The Kohistan was ripe for rebellion—fostered by the secret machinations of one Mohun Lal, Munshi to Alexander Burnes: a travelled Bengali, possessed of some talent, a flourishing conceit of himself, and a genius for traitor-making, "the lustre of which remained undimmed to the end of the war."

Thus the once powerful ruler found himself enmeshed on all sides, like a lion caught in a net. Yet to the last he trusted in two things—the strength of Ghazni and the loyalty of his sons. Ghazni—*Dar-us-Sultánat*,[1] impregnable through the ages—would never, surely, be taken by assault; and, if besieged, might well keep the Feringhis occupied for many months.

So thought the Amir; not without reason. The thoughts of Sir John Keane, when at length he looked upon that redoubtable fortress, are not on record. It is conceivable that they echoed Captain Thompson's remark about political information, in terms too forcible for print.

The sixty-foot ramparts of the Citadel, set high upon a swelling spur, beneath a wide semicircle of hills, seemed silently to mock at the light field-pieces advancing against it. Keane's practised eye saw at a glance that here were ramparts too formidable for mining or escalading; ramparts not to be breached by six- or nine-pounder guns. And the heavy siege-train was lying idle at Kandahar. Here, too, were men obviously intent on resistance; though Gholam Hyder Khan, son of Dōst Mahomed, must have quailed when he scanned through his telescope

[1] Seat of the Sultan's power.

the surging, purposeful mass of hostility that bore down upon him in the dawn of a radiant July morning.

Front and rear, so far as eye could reach, the plain was alive with ordered columns of horse and foot, with guns, camels and baggage-cattle, veiled in a dust-cloud of their own creating that imparted an ominous air of mystery to the whole.

But, for all its imposing array, Sir John Keane's army lacked the two essentials of conquest—supplies and heavy guns. The first lack debarred him from the wiser course of masking Ghazni and moving on at once to take Dōst Mahomed by surprise; the second vetoed all hope of breaching the walls. Yet, as it chanced, two incongruous elements combined to avert disaster—Mohun Lal's genius for traitor-making and the cool daring of three young engineers.

The Munshi's services are recorded by himself with an ingenuous complacency all his own. "It was discovered that we are to meet opposition in the stronghold of Afghanistan. I therefore sent a note to my old friend Abul Reshed, nephew of Dōst Mahomed, that if he leaves Hyder Khan and will join our camp, I will introduce him to the Envoy and his luck shall shine. He attended my advice, and . . . in fact, gave such valuable information . . . that Lord (then Sir John) Keane recommended him strongly to the Envoy, and got 500 rupees fixed for him from the Mission treasury."

To this highly-paid traitor Keane owed the "valuable information" that Ghazni, like Achilles, possessed one vulnerable spot—the Kābul Gate. All the others had been solidly built up with masonry; and if this one could be blown open, the fortress might be carried by a *coup de main*. The assault must be one of simple daring; and success, if obtained, would be bought with much

blood. But it was not in military human nature to reject the one chance whereby a flagrant error might be brilliantly redeemed.

So the order was given : and at dawn on the 22nd of July, while the garrison was deluded by a false attack on the Kandahar side, the sappers, under Captain Peat, were piling their powder-bags against the Kābul Gate. The command of this party had been offered by Thompson to his distinguished subaltern, Henry Marion Durand ; a tempting offer and no small compliment. Yet it was declined. With characteristic magnanimity, Durand urged the superior claim of Peat, a senior and a Bombay engineer ; asking only for himself the more perilous glory of placing the powder and firing the train. The soldierly request was granted, and the task carried through in gallant fashion—under a shower of stones, bricks and earth from the battlements above.

A column of smoke and flame ; a dull reverberation and the crash of falling masonry—heard above the rushing wind and the roar of the guns—told Dennie's storming party that their own moment had come.

The bugles sounded the advance. Then, for a few bewildering moments, men and officers were paralysed by a countermand to retreat—the error of an instant that might have ruined all.

As Keane—watching from the heights—dispatched a flying aide-de-camp, the error was rectified ; and the advance pealed forth again. With cheer on cheer, and the sharp crackle of musketry, four British regiments dashed forward. There was a desperate hand-to-hand struggle in the narrow passage, bayonets against swords ; then more cheers, more deafening volleys of musketry : and Sir John Keane drew a mighty breath of relief. The end had justified the means.

Ghazni had been carried by one of the "most spirited, skilful and successful *coups de main* in the annals of British India." Mistakes, however flagrant, were washed out by the blood of five hundred Afghans; and in place of censure, Keane reaped rewards more justly due to three young engineer officers, who had saved his reputation and their country's honour at the hazard of their own lives.

The sun, looking over the eastern hills, revealed the Union Jack billowing in a brisk wind above the Citadel of Ghazni, stronghold of Mahomedan dominion for more than a thousand years; and Afzul Khan, arriving with a body of cavalry to annihilate the "beaten invader," knew, by that astounding sign, that the end had come indeed. Son of Dōst Mahomed though he was, his courage was not proof against the shock. Forsaking all impedimenta, he fled back to Kābul, to bid his father prepare for the worst.

But that evil news sped faster than he. Before sunset on the 23rd, Dōst Mahomed knew that Ghazni, the impregnable, had gone the way of Kandahar; knew that this irretrievable loss involved the capture of one son, the defection of another. The threefold blow went near to break his heart—but not his spirit. Prostrated for a moment, he rose up the more fiercely determined to hold his own at Kābul—or die in the attempt.

His opening moves were prompt and to the point.

"Bid the swiftest horseman in the camp," said he, "carry word to Mahomed Akbar, Light of my Eyes, that there is greater need for him and his men here than at the Khyber. Let them come as wind before rain, staying not for food or drink. Send others also to tell Afzul Khan—no true Barakzai—that the father he hath dishonoured will not speak with him again."

It was done. Within the hour he stood before his chiefs, a gallant figure, for all the weight of trouble on his heart. He spoke frankly and not without bitterness of defection among the people; of his fear that even those whom he called friends and brothers might be tempted to desert a losing cause.

"Without the aid of a traitor could Ghazni have fallen in one night?" he demanded, clenching his hands upon the word as though that traitor's neck were between them. "Ghazni—citadel of Mahmud, All-Conqueror! It is not possible. If there be traitors here also, or cowards, wavering like corn in the breeze—let them depart, that I may have certain knowledge of the ground whereon I stand. Dōst Mahomed, brother of Futteh Khan, hath no need of men who desert in the day of battle."

All protested fidelity; and in the council of war that followed it was decided that, before giving battle, the Nawab Jubbar Khan should be sent to treat with Shah Shujah and his foreign friends.

"Bid them consider, Brother of my Heart," urged the Amir at parting, "that I make no unjust demands. I will even admit the claim of the Saddozai (though he failed to hold his own) if they will admit my hereditary claim to the office of Wazir."

Armed with this ultimatum the Nawab rode off escorted by half a dozen men; and in four days he covered the ninety miles between Kābul and Ghazni. Mohun Lal, the persuasive, ambled forth to meet him; his old friend Sekunder Burnes greeted him at the pickets; and his tent was pitched beside Macnaghten's own. Smiles and smooth speech were his portion; but, for all his earlier attachment to the English, the Nawab was in no pliable mood.

Confronted with the Royal Puppet, he demanded bluntly, "Why all this mighty *tamasha*? If *you* are to be king here, what use is this army of Feringhis? If they are to rule—which is most like—of what use are *you*? They have brought you hither with their money. Let them leave you now; and rule us—if you *can*."

But Shah Shujah, elate with victory, could afford to ignore the implied sneer.

"That will be done, when my kingdom is fully established; and the honourable Nawab Jubbar Khan shall surely enjoy confidential office close to the throne."

The Barakzai dismissed even royal blandishments with a dignity and decision that increased British predilection in his favour. Having come on his brother's business; and he put forward, in plain terms, the Amir's demand. Just and natural from one point of view; from the other, refusal was a foregone conclusion. With Dōst Mahomed for Wazir, Shah Shujah might as well remain at Ludhiāna.

Yet refusal, coupled with the offer of "honourable asylum" in British India, roused Jubbar Khan from tacit hostility into open anger.

"Honourable asylum—*Bismillah!*" He flung the phrase with scorn into Macnaghten's politely smiling face. "Dōst Mahomed Khan would far sooner throw himself upon British bayonets than upon British protection. To the true Afghan freedom is life, be it never so hazardous. As for me, I follow the fortunes of my brother; and as for you, Shah Shujah and Macloten Sahib, the God of Justice will require at your hands the lives of all the brave men who shall fall before this contest is ended."

Had a flash of foreknowledge been vouchsafed them, it might have given them pause. But their eyes being holden, they dismissed with affable contempt a foiled adversary's harangue: and next morning the Nawab rode

away with a heavy heart. For the first time in his life he had seen a British army encamped; and its appearance, its prevailing atmosphere of discipline, seemed silently to proclaim the hopelessness of armed resistance.

On the 1st of August he reached Kābul and delivered his unpalatable news. Its precise effect upon his brother he could not accurately guess. For Afghanistan's most notable Amir was a man made up of mighty opposites: at once just and unjust, merciful and cruel, rash and cautious, frank and treacherous. In truth, the finer elements were his by nature; the grosser ones fostered by a life of constant warfare, constant excitation of every evil impulse and passion that Afghan flesh is heir to. Compelled, again and again, to choose between sin and extinction, he sinned—boldly and flagrantly, as strong natures will. But the real man leaned always toward the way of uprightness and courage. Under a serener sky, on less barren soil, he might have risen to high rank as a ruler and a man: and never did his innate nobility shine forth more clearly than in this his penultimate hour of kingship.

Let the British army be never so imposing, he would go forth and make one stubborn stand against them in the valley of Maidán. For all their array of camels and canvas, these Feringhi-*lōg* had proven themselves, thus far, a people zealous to corrupt with money-bags and *jagirs*.[1] It remained to be seen whether they could bring into subjection by the sword. Ghazni had fallen through treachery; and, praise be to Allah, though his followers might be few, there were now no traitors in their midst.

The Nawab, though less assured, applauded his brother's spirit, and the order was given to move down to Arghandi

[1] Grants of land.

en route for Maidán. But at Arghandi the tragic conviction was forced on Dōst Mahomed that his confidence had been misplaced. The venal Kazzilbashes were secretly slipping away to the winning side; and even among those that remained the poison of treachery was fast leavening the whole lump.

It was the counterpart, on a small scale, of Napoleon's desperate days at Fontainebleau; and Dōst Mahomed of Afghanistan, though infinitely the lesser man, met this last unkindest stroke of fortune with no less of dignity and spirit than did the immortal Emperor.

If others were false, he was true to his manhood. Taking the Koran in his hand, he rode through the ranks of his assembled troops; then, confronting them, he adjured them by the Sacred Book, by all the names of God, not to disgrace their nation and dishonour their religion by rushing into the arms of one who had deluged the land with blaspheming infidels.

"You that are Afghans—you that are sons of the Prophet, stand firm and sway not in the hour of adversity! Rally round the Commander of the Faithful like heroes and true believers. Beat back the invader of your country or die in the glorious attempt. Have you not eaten my salt this thirteen years? Have I not served those whom I also ruled?"

Pausing, he scanned the row after row of imperturbable faces, seeking some glimmer of response.

Then he spoke again on a deeper note of feeling. "*Inshallah*—it is the will of God. If your hearts are set on seeking a new master, grant me one boon in return for years of maintenance and justice. Enable me to die with honour. Stand by the brother of Futteh Khan in his first and last charge against the cavalry of these Feringhi dogs. In that desperate onset he will fall.

Then go—go, every man of you, and make your own terms with Shah Shujah."

Again silence fell. Only here and there came a muttered response to that spirit-stirring appeal.

Again the Amir looked desperately round on those who called themselves his "followers"; and, in the bitterness of his heart, he disowned them once for all.

"Cowards and traitors as you are—go *now*. Lose no time. Purchase your own safety by a mockery of allegiance—and leave your true ruler to his fate. No man is strong enough to fight against Destiny. It is the will of God. *Rookshut*—you have leave to depart."

It was all they desired; and, like the followers of Napoleon, they were graceless in their eagerness to be gone. Many plundered him in going, even as Constant plundered the Emperor he had served more than fourteen years.

Yet, when it came to that final test, there remained some two thousand Afghan soldiers who could not find it in their hearts to desert so kingly a ruler, so brave a man: and to this staunch remnant were added the troops lately arrived under Akbar Khan. Escorted by these, and hampered by the inevitable crowd of relations and womenfolk, Dōst Mahomed set out for the valley of Bamián in the Hindu Kush, leaving Akbar, Light of his Eyes, with a handful of picked men to cover his retreat. From Bamián he would push on across the Afghan border and seek refuge in Bokhara—till the appointed day of retribution.

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It took time for news of these great doings to reach the handful of British officers now established at Herāt; very much occupied with their own complicated prob-

lems, with schemes of benevolence that should confirm and extend those already started by Pottinger himself.

On the 25th of July they had enjoyed a minor triumphal entry, in full-dress uniforms, escorted by Sepoys. Through crowded streets, they had ridden up to the Citadel, and had solemnly made their obeisance to Shah Kamrān. A dinner of some fifty Afghan dishes had been laid for them on the mud floor of an empty room, where they were joined by Yar Mahomed, in his silkiest mood, and eight or ten Sirdars of Herāt.

To their dismay they discovered that etiquette forbade them to sit cross-legged at meat; that instead they must contrive to kneel before their leaf platters in skin-tight overalls, sitting upon their heels. Now the heels of the Afghans were bare and their muscles inured to every form of genuflexion. But the heels of the British officers were adorned with spurs: a trivial detail that could no way modify a law of the Medes and Persians. So, with the best possible grace, they achieved the impossible; and for half an hour or more, they presented the undignified spectacle of eight tightly-buttoned-up Englishmen, hampered with swords and cocked hats, vainly trying to manipulate a pillau after the manner of Abraham: now lunging forward, now chasing rebellious fragments from havens where they should not be; and all the while discoursing affably upon affairs of State.

Ludicrous or no, they won through their ordeal creditably enough; but the courteous gravity of their hosts —who had never beheld a like *tamasha*—was beyond them. Let one man catch the eye of another, and "high politics" were interrupted by stifled explosions of laughter, which like other Feringhi peculiarities the Afghans politely ignored.

Not till the meal was over, and eight sorely-tried officers

sank upon their several cushions, did the flicker of a smile invade the gravity of Yar Mahomed's eyes.

D'Arcy Todd smiled frankly back at him. "You doubtless perceived the cause of our amusement, Sirdar Sahib? Our heels are not so well adapted for sitting on as your own."

"So I had reason to fear," the Afghan answered affably. "Indeed, if your Honour will not take it amiss, all those cocked hats and feathers stooping over the dishes put me in mind of hungry fowls picking up grain!"

The simile was greeted with a shout of laughter that dispelled formalities; and the new-comers, riding back through the city, voted Yar Mahomed quite a good fellow in his way; a far less formidable monster than Pottinger would have them believe. So does the spider beguile the fly that flutters into her web.

John Login had spent the evening in Pottinger's quarters; where they both spent much time during the next few weeks, discussing philanthropic enterprises dear to their hearts. The one an Orkney man, the other an Ulster man—the blood of Scandinavian ancestors ran in the veins of both; and they shared many fine elements of that heroic race. The seeds of a very real friendship between them were sown in those first days of working together for the desolate and oppressed. For the magnetism of Login and the sympathetic understanding of Todd had so far healed the hurt inflicted by Macnaghten, that Pottinger had changed his mind about giving up a post peculiarly his own. But this second hot weather, following on severe privations, had so damaged his health that change and rest from responsibility seemed imperative—for a time.

On this understanding, he and Todd decided to exchange duties; Todd to remain and act for him, while he carried

the Treaty of Alliance to Kābul and there applied for a year's leave home. This arrangement greatly eased his mind, as did the unaccustomed presence of other Englishmen, eager to share the labours and responsibilities that had too long been crowded upon one very broad pair of shoulders.

At first the change, however welcome, had proved something of a strain. Two years of living more or less as an Afghan among Afghans, culminating in nine months without sight or speech of a European, had left their mark. Yet underneath his Eastern turban and *choga* he remained British to the core; the more so, perhaps, because only by keeping tenacious hold upon the things that are true and lovely and of good report could he avoid the risk of slipping insensibly to the lower moral plane of those around him. For on man—that mysterious compound of desires and convictions—environment acts in directly opposite ways. To its insidious influence, the finer chameleon temperament, or the grosser nature, responds by conscious or unconscious adaptation: while the man of principle or of marked personality no less instinctively keeps his balance by leaning in an opposite direction.

So it was with Eldred Pottinger. For two years he had lived and breathed in an atmosphere poisonously charged with evil. And if at times the outer man must seem to conform, the inner man had held resolutely aloof. Thus his reserve and his natural gift of silence had increased with constant loneliness: and he must, at first, have been voted a dull companion by a party of young Englishmen, eager, interested and overflowing with the natural *camaraderie* of the soldier. Bearded and turbaned, the thoughtfulness of his eyes deepened by intimate knowledge of evil and pain, it was difficult

to believe him not yet eight-and-twenty; two years younger than Login, three years younger than Todd. And he, too, may well have felt older, in every way; mentally aloof from their optimistic half-knowledge, their projects and schemes. But it did not take him long to perceive the sterling qualities and sincerity of purpose underlying their young lightness of heart; and aloofness soon gave place to readier comradeship on his side, increasing respect on theirs.

As for John Login, his ardour, fine temper and unconquerable cheerfulness captivated Eldred Pottinger, as they had captivated his companions on the march. Here was a man of commanding personality, wholesome, invigorating, steeped in the sovereign quality of sympathy: a personality revealed in a face of remarkable breadth and power, a noble brow and eyes that seemed to have caught the colour of the sea he would fain have served. Disapproving parents decreed that instead he should serve the maimed, the halt and the blind; and India—stepmother of many heroes—was enriched by one hero the more.

In Pottinger, Login was quick to recognise a philanthropic fervour that matched his own; though all that he had actually done and planned for the poor of Herāt was as hard to come at as his personal share in the defence of the city. To this peculiarity Login himself afterwards paid a tribute worth recording.

> "Pottinger," he wrote, "was as remarkable for his candour in making known his mistakes as for his modesty in alluding to his services. Although he had faithfully reported to Government that he kicked Yar Mahomed's brother out of his house, for giving him the lie (which led Lord Auckland to

declare him unfit to be our representative in Herāt), he had said nothing at all of his conduct in driving back the Persians at the last assault, when the city was almost in their hands. It was only after the Mission under D'Arcy Todd had arrived and Pottinger had left the place, that his boldness and gallantry became fully known ; and his successor had the duty—which to his generous spirit was a most pleasing one—of reporting his heroic deeds to Government. Pottinger was one of those men who do not shine on paper, and who should never be asked to give a reason for their acts."

In adding this last Login may have remembered the dictum that " true heroism feels and never reasons ; and therefore is always right." But Governments are slow to recognise heroism ; and " reasons in writing " are their peculiar perquisites, which they can rarely afford to forgo.

When joining Todd's mission, Login had been given the option of remaining at Herāt or returning to Kābul with the bearer of the treaty ; for his services were always in demand. But he had not been a week in the place before he decided to stay. He loved a maximum of work as most men love a maximum of leisure. The poor of the city were to be his special charge, and his enthusiasm caught fire at the prospect of carrying on a work so nobly begun.

This decision brought him into closer touch with Pottinger, whose tongue could be more readily unloosed on the subject of education for those forty orphans he had rescued from slavery, and kept under his personal care ; or alleviations for the hapless two thousand, who still flocked to him in the market-place for their one meal a

day. So it came about that the two spent many evenings together in Pottinger's room, discussing the details of schemes new and old; building visionary hospitals, dispensaries, bungalows, which, in time, were actually built, and remained as legacies of high endeavour long after that endeavour had been brought to naught.

On this particular evening, Pottinger had sat silent a long while, absorbed in a modest-looking native book handed to him by Login, with smiling elation, half an hour before. The characters were Persian, the language Pushtu; the matter nothing less than the Christian Gospels and Epistles, on which Pottinger himself had been spending all his spare time and strength for the past few months.

Login sat opposite, scanning his new friend's manuscript with intermittent murmurs of approval. Sprucely clad, and clean-shaven, but for a small moustache, his appearance accentuated Pottinger's Eastern aspect, which he could not alter if he would. For the political uniform, mufti and books sent up with the army had been unceremoniously dropped by the way.

Suddenly both men looked up. Their eyes met in mutual understanding; and Pottinger closed his book.

"I'm glad you brought this, Login," said he. "It ought to do much good. Even if it fails to convince them, merely reading that incomparable story must have some ennobling influence on those who are less incorrigible than Yar Mahomed and his crew. At least that was the idea that tempted me to try my hand at some sort of translation. You will find my friends the Syuds very open-minded. They have been genuinely interested even in my stuff. But this is a vast deal better. A pity I wasted my time——"

"My dear sir, you did nothing of the kind."

"I believe you're right," Pottinger admitted, smiling. "The work helped to keep me going when things looked blacker than usual. And if Herāt has no need of my lame version, it will please my mother."

"A good enough excuse for its existence! Mine would be a proud woman if I'd achieved as much—to say nothing of the rest! I was reading St. Paul, in Persian, with the old Chief Rabbi this morning; and he told me, with tears in his eyes, that but for you they would have cut down his synagogue for fuel after the siege. They're fine fellows—some of these Asiatic Jews; and they seemed quite impressed with my carpet-making scheme."

Pottinger's grave face lit up.

"It's a splendid plan. I was a fool not to think of it months ago. But I've been Jack of all trades here—and master of none."

There was no bitterness, only weariness in Pottinger's tone: and Login said in a different manner, "Tell that to the others, Pottinger; I know better. It will take time for us to discover all you've mastered in these two years. How about Yar Mahomed Khan?"

Pottinger shook his head. "My dear Login, no Englishman, with a rudiment of a conscience, will ever master that devil in man's clothing."

"Is that so, indeed? Bhuggāt Rām is beginning to cherish hopes——"

"Bhuggāt Rām——? Oh—you mean Todd. Perhaps it's as well. I cherished them once! They don't thrive in the soil of Herāt. But his *kismet* may be better than mine; and he'll bask in the Envoy's favour, which is always sustaining! But we're deserting your carpets."

For an hour or more the two sat over Pottinger's rickety writing-table hammering out fresh details of a

scheme to revive the making of carpets, which had long since been the glory of Herāt. In her day of ruin and stagnation, there remained no more than two or three old men who knew anything at all of the once famous industry. But that was enough for John Login. He brought his magnetism to bear on those aged Herātis; and by sheer persistence, breathed life into a dead industry that would provide occupation for hundreds of idle hands: a far more important consideration in his eyes than replenishing the coffers of Herāt. Pottinger had started agricultural relief works, had set the lame and blind to grinding corn; but Login hoped to employ in his new industry many of the two thousand supported by charity since the siege. Women and old men, unfit for heavier work, could be utilised for spinning, sorting and carding. The work might be coarse at first, but it would improve; as indeed it did, with such astonishing rapidity that within a year Login's Herāti carpets vied with the best that Persia could produce.

It was at this time that Pottinger decided on taking six of his orphan boys to India for medical training. The rest he could confidently leave to the care of Login and Todd. One of them was already Login's slave; following him everywhere, a silent, adoring shadow; sleeping like a dog outside his door; till the Hakeem Sahib—whom all deemed a wizard—raised him to the dignity of service, and the cup of his content was full.

Throughout August's rainless heat the houses and streets of Herāt were unbearable. But the officers of the Mission—absorbed in new interests and new work—abated their activity no whit. Though none surpassed Login for energy and zeal, each in his sphere was well employed: Saunders on the fortifications; the subalterns

drilling and organising Kamrān's remnant of an army; D'Arcy Todd involved in a maze of problems—none more insoluble than Yar Mahomed Khan.

Herāt was blessed in her first experience of the British officer at close quarters. Arthur Conolly—most lovable and incorrigible of idealists—had led the way. Followed Eldred Pottinger, less ardent and imaginative, yet a man of supreme courage and resolution; neither smoking nor drinking, and of such consistent self-restraint in private as in public life that Mahomedans deemed him a Syud of exceptional holiness. And now came eight other Englishmen of like countenance; men who added to ability and enthusiasm, a moral motive power forged by the religious convictions of their day; who, without any temple, met together for worship; and by their blameless lives, in the midst of debauchery, set a living example of the faith that was in them: an example worth more than a library of sermons.

As for the Herāti Afghans, denounced by Login as "a very drunken lot," they marvelled at the folly of men who abjured the joys of intoxication, though wine was not forbidden by their religion. In addition to this, and other peculiarities, the fact that all were bachelors and left their women unmolested, bewildered a folk who reckoned marriage a personal necessity and a man's first duty to his nation, race or clan.

James Abbott has told how his Afghan servant spoke of the general amazement; adding, "Not all our mysteries of steam, bare heads, coat tails, cock's feathers and unveiled women, so bewildered and impressed the fancy of Mahomedans as that an article made in pairs should, among Feringhis, be constantly found separated; like disunited legs of compasses, or a gross of boots for the right foot! It is vain to argue the point, to talk of

wandering comets. In their eyes it seems so simple to take a wife at each important place."

But Pottinger and his successors ignored this practical view of the matter. Less zealous than Burnes to follow local fashions, none of them found it necessary to increase his knowledge of Eastern ways and wiles by establishing a harem, or taking to himself a wife from among the "children of Ammon." Pottinger's ascetic fashion of life had been excused on the ground that he was Syud and a friend of Syuds. But these others also!—*Wah! Wah!* It was incredible! Yet the incredible fact remained: and the impression of British character, so formed, remained also, long after missions and treaties and visions of political expansion had melted into the air.

Unhappily at Kandahar and Kābul it was otherwise. Login himself said later, that if the first European officers quartered in those cities had shown the same high sense of their responsibilities, the same zeal to uphold England's honour in the eyes of hostile Mahomedans, "we might, humanly speaking, have been spared a very humiliating chapter in the history of Afghanistan." And in all they did, as in all they were, that devoted band of soldiers commanded admiration and respect, even from the Afghans who stood amazed at their mania for gratuitous exertion; while the people themselves "marvelled that strangers to them in faith should lavish lakhs of rupees and all their energies to alleviate the sufferings of wretched beings who could never even hope to be useful citizens."

One man, alone, execrated that which excited wonder in the rest. He saw, in their enthusiastic benevolence, merely a veiled plot to render him more than ever abhorrent to the people he ground under his heel. But for the moment it suited him to give these madmen their

head; while he stood aside, watchful, complacent—biding his time.

So thought Pottinger, who alone knew the man; and did not envy Todd the coming political duel, whereof he could foresee almost every move. But to say too much were merely to seem the "croaker" Macnaghten already believed him; and he wisely contented himself with emphasising two important points.

"Remember this, Todd," he said at parting, "if you want to avoid a repetition of the horrors we have just pulled through, you *must* insist on appointing one of our own officers to superintend the cultivating and storing of grain for famine relief; and be sure you keep up my new plan of paying all moneys *direct* from the British treasury to those concerned. If you do that, you may hold on here. If not—I wouldn't give much for your chance of success. You can take my word, there are only two courses open to us here. Either we must decisively assert our power, or depart and leave these two monsters to misgovern as they choose."

But for Todd, as for Macnaghten, conciliation was the catchword of the moment; and the advice of the one man who could speak from intimate knowledge was disregarded—with the inevitable result.

Months after, when the costly futility of Macnaghten's Herāt policy had been proved up to the hilt, John Login wrote to a friend: "Yar Mahomed was right in supposing that the influence of the English at Herāt would have become far too deep-rooted to suit his taste. . . . Yet I have little doubt that had the arrangement made by Eldred Pottinger been continued we might have held Herāt throughout all the subsequent reverses in Afghanistan." "Ifs" and "buts" are kittle-kattle. Change one least factor in past events, and no man living can gauge

the result. Yet there is good reason to believe that John Login spoke truth.

For him, more than for any of the others, Pottinger's departure would be a loss indeed. But all had been set in working order; the high-sounding treaty ratified; and there remained no further reason for delay.

On September the 1st—in accordance with native custom—the travellers spent their last night encamped without the walls: Ritchie and Pottinger, with his six orphan boys, and his old friend Hakeem Mahomed Hussain, lately returned to the city. Their safe transit was ensured by a guide and Todd's former escort of twenty horse, added to Pottinger's Herātis under Allah Dad Khan.

On the 10th—owing to unexpected delays—they set out for Kābul, by way of the Hazara highlands and the Valley of Bamián: Pottinger, though severely pulled down in health, upheld in spirit by the knowledge that he had done his duty to the utmost, regardless of personal results.

Within a year he would return, please God, refreshed by the long sea voyage, by sights and sounds of Home. Yet—turning for a farewell look at the white-walled, many-towered city of his baptism in suffering, action, fame—he wondered whether he would ever set eyes on it again; whether D'Arcy Todd, armed with more enthusiasm than knowledge, would hold his own against the Napoleon of Central Asia for the space of a year.

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That march to Kābul—leisurely, uneventful and infinitely welcome to a lover of the road—lasted near two months; two months of respite from official correspondence, from

political friction and responsibility. So far as he could judge, the outlook seemed promising enough. At Kābul, Shah Shujah sat in state on the throne of his "very few ancestors," while his noble allies rejoiced after the peculiar fashion of their race. At Herāt he had left a devoted band of men who—if success were commensurate with effort—could scarcely fail of achievement. Yet, in that brief two months both Macnaghten and Todd made discoveries sufficiently disconcerting to men whose belief in the Great Game stood only second to their belief in God.

Macnaghten had expected D'Arcy Todd's report to justify his assertion to Lord Auckland that British influence could only be established at Herāt by "gaining the confidence of the Wazir and his co-operation in the removal of existing abuses." But before October was out, Todd, the hopeful and zealous, found himself constrained to echo the conviction of Pottinger—the supposed croaker and alarmist—that "a friendly footing here seems quite impossible, and it appears to me the only alternative is to attack or be attacked."

Nor was his opinion of Yar Mahomed—now our ally by treaty—more encouraging than that already received.

> "The fact seems," he wrote, "that honest and open policy can be neither appreciated nor understood by those . . . who believe that open dealing is the smooth surface which conceals a more dangerous design. That we should win by bounty what we can take by force seems to them absurd. Benefits, therefore, only weaken decision. . . . Since beginning this letter I have been favoured with a visit from the Wazir, attended by sixty armed men; ostensibly applicants for bounty, but really guards in case of

treachery. He made new and large demands on the Mission Treasury, doubtless with a view to ascertaining how far my suspicions were roused and incensing against us those whose claims we might deny. I put him off with fair words . . . and said I had heard of the arrival of our treaty of friendship at Kandahar; adding, that I soon expected to hear it had been printed and dispersed throughout the world.

"This appeared to startle him. 'What,' said he, 'do you always *print* your treaties?' 'Yes,' I repeated. 'We can afford to do so, for we never break them.' They refused to drink our tea, perhaps fearing poison; and the chief Eunuch seemed so alarmed at the turn of the conversation that he abruptly broke up the party and they took their leave."

So much for the wisdom of blackening the British name in Central Asia by overtures to a Yar Mahomed Khan.

Happily for Macnaghten this cheering communication did not reach him till November; for he was beset with uncongenial discoveries nearer home. In the very month of his triumphal entry he found himself confronted by three facts, calculated to test optimism even of the blindest: Dōst Mahomed had escaped; the Shah was openly disappointed and ill-content; while his "popularity" stood self-proven a fiction, that must either be laboriously kept up, or acknowledged at the cost of revealing the false foundation beneath the whole imposing house of cards.

The "adoration" discovered by Macnaghten at Kandahar was, here, conspicuously absent. Worse than all, the King himself evinced little of gratitude to his

benefactors and less of satisfaction with the mutilated remnant of an empire that had once extended from Balkh to Shikarpore, from Herāt to Kashmir.

Sitting apathetically day after day at the window of his high citadel, looking out upon the domes and flat mud roofs of Kābul, on the once familiar expanse of orchard, lake and barren mountain, no thrill of elation stirred in him. A tired, disillusioned old man of seventy, he suffered the common experience of all who return in age to scenes loved in their youth. City and palace, lake and valley—seen for thirty years through the magnifying lens of memory—seemed unaccountably small and mean ; scarce worth the irksome burden of indebtedness to these masterful, ubiquitous Feringhis, who had generously endowed him with the semblance of power, while reserving the substance for themselves. Forgetful, too soon, of exiled years, of hardships and successive defeats, he resented their conspicuous share in his restoration and the still more conspicuous part they seemed likely to play in reorganising his kingdom.

But if he mistrusted the Feringhis, his mistrust of the Afghans went deeper still. He had enough of shrewdness to perceive that it was one thing to sit enthroned in the Bala Hissar, and very much another to control a mercenary, quarrelsome, restless people, for whom he had little love, and in whose eyes his dependence on infidels had greatly humiliated him. So he, like Macnaghten, found himself between two fires : doubtful of all about him ; more profoundly doubtful of himself. The mere fact that both he and his Envoy suspected his inability to keep his throne, without British support, was a scathing commentary on Lord Auckland's disingenuous proclamation, which had set the whole project in train.

It was a time of painful uncertainty and indecision ;

a time fraught with big issues for all concerned. Throughout those last weeks of August '39 the honour of England, the prestige of British arms and the fate of countless brave men hung in the balance. But if Macnaghten cherished secret misgivings, and the Shah secret distrust, on the surface all was gaiety and reaction after nine months of strenuous effort and endurance.

Officially gilded, the net result seemed all that could be desired. It was given out that a series of masterly operations had been crowned with uniform success; that Russia had been rebuked; Persia overawed and Dōst Mahomed's power broken; that the Shah restored, "by the blessing of God," to an undisputed throne, held the keys of India in his hand.

When the news of Kandahar "adoration" and of Ghazni reached England, Whig enthusiasm ran high. Sir John Hobhouse proudly declared himself the father of the war; and approval resulted in the usual crop of honours, bestowed with more than the usual lack of discernment. Auckland became an earl, Keane a peer, Macnaghten a baronet. Only the Iron Duke, in his wisdom, bade them remember the lesson of Moscow, and prophesied that where their military successes ended, their real troubles would begin.

At Kābul the spirit of jubilation found expression in reviews, races, entertainments, and finally in a grand Durbar, for the public destribution of a newly-invented Durāni order. British officers and men, happy in the belief that they would soon be returning to India, amused themselves to the top of their bent: riding races, buying mementoes of a unique experience; exploring, with eager interest, convivialities of the living, relics of the dead.

No lack of conviviality in a city whose men were as noted for hospitality as her women for beauty and love of

intrigue. Afghans are consumedly jealous for the honour of their wives. Yet that the ill repute of Kābul was mainly founded on fact, is proved by a well-known saying : "The flour of Kābul is not without lime, nor the woman of Kābul without a paramour." Even among better-class Afghans, so long as purdah was strictly kept, the woman enjoyed an amount of individual freedom rare in the East : and if at times she made ill use of it, the *boorkha*, like charity, cloaked a multitude of sins. Beneath its shapeless folds lurked the eternal siren, in gaily coloured tunic and wide trousers, hair elaborately plastered, ears outlined with silver rings, eyelids heavy with antimony, cheeks adorned with rouge and tinsel patches of gold or silver cunningly set—the ceaseless instigator of blood feuds and disturber of household peace.

But socially, as elsewhere in India, she seemed almost non-existent. At an Afghan *soirée*, attended—out of sheer curiosity—by Outram and three friends, she was represented only by the inevitable nautch girl and two ancient Sybils who supported her in song and dance. Their host was none other than Abdul Reshed, who, at Mohun Lāl's instigation, had sold Ghazni and his uncle the Amir for five hundred rupees. To this not very creditable service he owed the privilege of entertaining British officers, who were rather amused than impressed by their first introduction to the "town house" of a Barakzai lord.

A rough wooden door, a narrow passage black as the pit ; an open courtyard roofed with stars, furnished with refuse heaps and tethered horses ; a staircase, narrow as the passage, with never a *chirāg* to reveal murderous roof-beams to the drunken or the unwary ; an empty balcony ; and beyond, at last, the inner room, dimly lit, filled with bearded men. Here they were greeted with

the prescribed chorus of kind inquiries: "*Jor-asti?*[1] *Khush-asti?*[2] *Salaam aleikum.*[3]" Here, lolling on cushions, they were served with fruits and pillau and the pungent Kābul spirit twice the strength of gin. Finally a *hookah* was passed, without prejudice, from mouth to mouth, not excluding the hired band, whose inhuman energy and weird minor discords precluded all necessity for making conversation.

Then came the nautch girl—probably the first seen in Kābul since the fall of Dōst Mahomed Khan. For that despised barbarian had, of late years, rivalled Cromwell himself in the enforcement of rigid morality on his people. The professional dancer had been abolished; the production of alcohol put down by law. Now, in the twinkling of an eye, all was changed. With the advent of a Christian army the trade in spirits became the most profitable in the town; and the prompt revival of the nautch girl reasserted the futility of attempting to lift human character by legislation; of enforcing from without that which can only be permanently wrought from within.

Thus did the sociability of the Afghans, and their zest for manly sports, blind officers and men to the devils of cruelty and cunning that lurked under their skins: and mutual satisfaction was the mood of the hour. Yet all were impatient for the expected order to return. Life at Kābul, though an amusing novelty, soon proved too costly to suit the lean purse of the British officer: and the Bombay troops, under Willshire, received with joy the command to march on September the 18th, *via* Kandahar and Sindh, calling at Khelāt by the way to punish Mehrāb Khan.

[1] Are you strong? [2] Are you happy?
[3] Peace be with you.

Those who wished them God-speed looked eagerly for their own order of release. They had done their duty. Shah Shujah's kingdom was established. On the surface there appeared no reason for hesitation or delay. But below the surface lay many discreditable truths; and the longer Macnaghten looked at his quandary, the more he shirked the only honest course of action. His faith in Shah Shujah's popularity, though shaken, was not extinct; yet he dared not risk leaving too soon the King, who was no King, lest Mehrāb Khan's prophecy be fulfilled and the Government of India overwhelmed with disgrace. Like many men who have risen in a graded service, and breathed too long the relaxing air of officialdom, he feared responsibility. But his position was unique; and for the first time in his life he had tasted the intoxicating wine of power. His real, if unadmitted, desire was to remain: and with mortals of average morality, the secret desire of the heart is the ruling factor in the day of decision.

And of pretexts there were plenty to hand, though the obvious objections to military occupation outweighed them in the scale. Ranjit Singh was dead, and India—threatened with serious disturbance in the Punjab—could afford neither money nor troops to garrison a country like Afghanistan. On the other hand, Pottinger had reported rumours of a Russian force preparing to move on Khiva, and Shah Shujah did not conceal his fear that Dōst Mahomed, backed by Akbar Khan and the Ghilzais, would seize the first opportunity of dislodging him from the throne.

There was also Dr. Lord—an over-eager political—harassing Macnaghten's nerves with a wild tale of the Dōst, established at Kunduz, reinforced by the whole country west of the Hindu Kush; of open rebellion

only forty miles from Kābul, and all Turkestan pouring forward to help the Amir recover his throne.

For a man in search of pretexts here was treasure-trove indeed! Lord Keane was promptly informed that no mere brigade, but the first division of the Bengal Army must remain in Afghanistan.

His Lordship, grown sceptical of the Envoy's alarms, replied that Macnaghten was welcome to any troops needed by the King, so long as he himself could leave the country without delay.

Macnaghten had just indited a long "official" to Lord Auckland explaining and justifying his change of plans—when it was discovered that the formidable rising was a fairy-tale invented by an escort unwilling to cross the Hindu Kush; that the men were openly retailing their successful ruse as an excellent joke.

To be convicted of having swallowed whole a palpably improbable scare was not a little humiliating for both Englishmen; though in Macnaghten's case there was compensation. The fairy-tale had served its turn. He had committed himself to Keane and Auckland, and had no mind to draw back. On so paltry a chance did the whole disastrous business turn.

But as yet the Envoy saw only—the throne safeguarded and his own secret wish fulfilled.

20

But it was one thing to decide on military occupation in force, and quite another to find suitable accommodation for officers and men, for the endless impedimenta of soldier life. General orders decreed that the division be broken up into detachments that should garrison the four

chief cities—Kābul, Ghazni, Jalālabad and Kandahar; assigning to Kābul the 13th Light Infantry and 35th Native Infantry, with a light field battery and the Shah's troops under Brigadier Roberts, father of the late Lord Roberts. For all these, suitable cover must be found or prepared before the terrible Kābul winter set in. No cantonment could possibly be built till the following spring. But Macnaghten, occupied with State festivities and formalities, seemed inclined to evade this fresh problem, though pressed by Henry Durand, the engineer in charge, for leave to strengthen the Bala Hissar and put up temporary quarters within its walls.

Set upon a height overlooking Kābul, this citadel within a citadel was the one point of strength in a singularly defenceless town, wedged between one of the Pughman Hills and an outlier of the Hindu Kush. At the roots of the most easterly hill, the Bala Hissar reared battlemented walls, woefully out of repair and circled by a broad stagnant moat. The space within—a small town in itself—occupied one-fourth of the city. A two-storied gate, on the west, opened straight into the streets of Kābul; and on the south-west, perched upon a cone-shaped hill, towered the upper citadel, commanding the entire fort, city and suburbs. From a military point of view, all hinged on repairing and securing this stronghold, wherein a thousand men and a few guns could set all Afghanistan at defiance. The lower citadel contained buildings in plenty that could be utilised for troops and stores. But the Shah raised puerile difficulties; Macnaghten seemed loth to press the point; and Durand, in despair, appealed to Brigadier Sale. Between them they had their way, and the hero of Ghazni lost no time in setting his pioneers to work.

But his triumph was short-lived. Sight of the new scheme going forward upset the royal nerves.

"Mackloten Sahib, this entirely may not be," declared His Majesty in a fever of agitation. "My people send complaints. If I close my ears to them, I shall become unpopular even as the Amir. It is not meet that Feringhi soldiers be lodged in a fort overlooking my own palace and grounds."

These frivolous objections were not easy to dismiss: and Macnaghten, fatally pliable, was hampered by his own false position. Without arguing the point, he promptly stopped all work inside the Bala Hissar—and laid the foundation-stone of ultimate disaster.

Kābul's one defensible position was turned into a harem for eight hundred and sixty women, and the upper story of the town gateway consecrated to the royal band. How far Shah Shujah may have been prompted by the cunning of his race it is impossible to say. But if he secretly desired to cripple the power of his over-enterprising friends, this last ironic whim was a master-stroke of diplomacy.

Having achieved his end, the troops were graciously permitted to be quartered in the Bala Hissar throughout the winter, on the understanding that, in the spring, cantonments should be built on the plain without the walls.

For this purpose, he generously offered one of his royal orchards; a long, low expanse of land, lying between river and canal, commanded on all sides by forts, villages and hills—a pleasant, innocuous spot for a military picnic: less pleasant, and far from innocuous, when Reality, in terrible fashion, dispelled the Dream of a grateful King, a reformed Government and a devoted people.

In the circumstances, Durand was not sorry to find his name among those detailed to return with Lord Keane;

and the General himself—who must have felt a warm regard for this gallant, capable subaltern—remarked to him on the day of departure: "I hoped you might remain here, for the good of the public service. As it is, I can only congratulate you on quitting this country. Mark my words, it will not be long before there is here some signal catastrophe."

But all thought of catastrophe was far from Macnaghten and from those who relied on his judgment. He followed up his demand for extra troops with an assurance that "affairs being considered so secure, he and the married officers determined to send for their wives." John Conolly was dispatched with an escort to bring from India some thirty English women and children, with all their household goods; and Captain George Lawrence of the 2nd Light Cavalry was appointed Personal Assistant to the Envoy in his stead.

A short, slim man with quick-glancing eyes like a bird, and an inexhaustible fund of energy and good spirits, was George Lawrence, commonly called "Cocky" Lawrence by his friends. Singularly unlike his famous elder brothers, he shared many of their finest qualities; and in this respect, as in matters of personal devotion, Macnaghten could have made no happier choice. Lawrence's faith in the wisdom and ability of his chief remained invincible to the end; but, unlike Macnaghten, he had the good sense to recognise that Afghanistan was no fit country for Englishwomen. So, when Lady Macnaghten and other deserted wives set out on their adventurous journey into the wilds, Charlotte Lawrence and her children set sail for England with a heavy heart. But, before the Afghan drama was played out, she had reason to bless her husband's chivalrous consideration.

Kābul, it seemed, was to become indefinitely a pleasant, healthy British cantonment, with a Royal Figurehead to keep up appearances. A false estimate of Afghan character, and the absence of anything like united opposition, tended to put them all off their guard; and they all proceeded to make themselves at home in their new surroundings with the ready adaptability that has played no mean part in the growth of England's empire. British officers, installed in the houses of departed chiefs, were, on the whole, well content; more so than the Afghans themselves. For, at Kābul, the prospect of Englishmen quartered in the city was viewed with a distaste and distrust that had been conspicuously absent at Herāt.

The reason for this has been justly, if severely, stated by Sir Henry Durand: "The first Mission to Kābul had established for the British moral character an ill reputation, and the conduct of others—whom it is needless to name—was not calculated to remove this unfavourable impression. The consequence was that officers searching for residence in the city . . . heard their guides execrated for bringing licentious infidels into the vicinity."

The ill repute of their own women may have increased the uneasiness with which Afghan men beheld that unknown quantity, the British officer, lodged within their gates. He was so lodged, nevertheless; and November the 4th was fixed by Macnaghten as the date on which the Court, the Envoy and army headquarters would march down to winter at Jalālabad, leaving a detachment at Kābul under Brigadier Robert Sale.

Even before they left, there were signs incontestable that the double government was far from achieving its aim as regards the country or the King. The more zealously British authority upheld him, the less secure became his seat, the more unpopular his rule.

Silently, inexorably, every move, every incident contributed its quota towards the ultimate tragedy. On every count, the new system—launched with such cheerful assurance—proved radically unsound; self-doomed to collapse with a crash and bury its authors in the ruins. "A mock King; a civil administration, hated because under foreign dictation; . . . an Envoy, the real King, ruling by the gleam of British bayonets; . . . a large army raising the price of provisions and preying upon a very poor country"—these were the disastrous results of failing to keep good faith with the Afghans and to withdraw the British army while the moral effect of its successes had left a genuine impression of power.

Yet William Macnaghten was "an honourable man." For all his ambition and shallow optimism, he firmly believed in the beneficence of his far-flung schemes for Central Asian expansion and reform; a belief that made his supremacy at Kābul the more dangerous for himself and for the honour of his country.

Before leaving for Jalālabad he seriously considered the change-over at Herāt. As yet he had received no complete report from Todd. But seeing that he was fresher to Herāt, less "prejudiced" than Pottinger, he could be trusted to take a more hopeful view of friendly possibilities. He also possessed the virtue of being Macnaghten's personal friend. The other's deserts were undeniable, and he should be well provided for; but Todd should remain at Herāt.

So he decided, conveniently ignoring the fact that Pottinger would soon be at Kābul, and had specially begged the Envoy to see him before taking any decisive steps; ignoring also Lord Auckland's opinion expressed in a minute, lately received: "I would not disturb

Lieutenant Pottinger at Herāt. His name is attached to the establishment of British influence in that city. He has had a most difficult task to execute; and I would suspend all opinion . . . till I have a report of the result of the Mission of Major Todd." Login was suggested as a suitable assistant for Pottinger; and with those two at Herāt—not over-much hampered by red-tape—England might have held her own there through all the stormy days to come.

But the conjunction of two officers so resolute, practical and clear-sighted was not at all to Macnaghten's taste. Invariably he fell foul of the strong, straight-spoken, uncompromising man; frankly admitted his virtues, but personally desired him elsewhere.

And he was now in a position to fulfil his own desires, so—before seeing Pottinger or receiving Todd's report—he wrote to Torrens explaining why he deemed it "proper and expedient to relieve Lieutenant Pottinger permanently at Herāt." He did not wish "in any way to disparage so able and zealous an officer, who had represented the British Government in troublous times"; but begged leave to point out that "in the strict discharge of duty he had inevitably made many powerful enemies, whose influence would obstruct the success of any negotiations conducted through him." The Envoy hoped, in conclusion, that means might be found to employ Lieutenant Pottinger elsewhere in the sphere of his authority.

The "many powerful enemies" were a vague and visionary crew. But they looked convincing on paper; and doubtless Macnaghten believed in their existence. He dispatched his letter with a pleasing sense of duty done, in happy ignorance of the fact that he had rendered a better service to Pottinger than to his friend D'Arcy Todd.

21

POTTINGER—as has been said—took his own time over that southward march.

Passing through the Hazara country by a new route, full of interest for the soul of an explorer, he decided to increase still further his knowledge of the country by approaching Kābul through the strange and remarkable valley of Bamián—destined to become the scene of his last and proudest achievement in Afghanistan.

Thus he reached Kābul, early in November, to find that the Envoy and his imposing *cortège* had already gone on before.

But a strong British element remained to mark the drastic changes thrust on the City of Orchards since he had slipped away from her to meet the great adventure of his life. Into the Bala Hissar Sale's detachment of troops had brought an air of purposeful activity; and at dawn the lively notes of *réveillé* clashed with the *muezzin's* long-drawn call to prayer.

As yet Pottinger saw in these things no reason for regret. Like most British officers in the country, he was ready to believe that nothing but good could spring from the dominance of right-minded Christian gentlemen over a nation of manly but savage barbarians. But he was not tempted, on this occasion, to prolong his stay at Kābul. Ignorant of that letter to Lord Auckland, he had much to discuss with Macnaghten concerning the future of Herāt. No snow had yet fallen, but it was bitterly cold; and the terrible series of passes between Kābul and Jalālabad were ill to traverse in winter—as he and others were to discover tragically in two years' time.

In November 1839 Eldred Pottinger and his modest escort rode unmolested across ninety miles of hill-country, rough and savage as the men it breeds; rode, now through an encompassing silence, that preyed upon the mind; now through the roar and rattle of mountain torrents, that echoed among the terrible cliffs closing in on either hand. Nine marches in all: but it is in the first six that the defiles of Afghanistan most fiercely and ferociously defy the intruder: Khurd-Kābul, Huft Kōtal, Tazin, Jagdalak, Gandamak—names then scarcely known even by Anglo-Indians, yet fated to become terribly familiar when the time was ripe for the return journey of the "grand promenade."

On the evening of their first march Pottinger and his party encamped, nine miles out, at the entrance to the first and most formidable defile of them all—the Khurd-Kābul Pass. After the sixth mile all trace of vegetation, all sign of life, human or animal, had ceased to be; and now, but for the riot of the river, they seemed to have reached the gate of death. Seen by starshine on a night of frost, the mass of converging hills loomed sullenly—a stupendous ink-blot on the greyish-purple of a November sky. Dawn revealed them, starkly majestic, twin ranges of basalt, streaked with iron-stone, carved by snow and frost into craggy precipices, so lofty and close-set that down in the depths—where men and animals painfully followed the winding of the river—high noon was little more than gloaming; afternoon, night; and night itself black as the space between the worlds.

On first entering the chill twilight of this great defile, Eldred Pottinger had an awed, uplifted sense, as of passing into the precincts of a cathedral; a sense of remoteness from everyday realities. But when slowly, steadily, the cliffs drew in closer, as if threatening to wedge the life

out of them, awe gave place to a nameless oppression of spirit; and that in turn to sheer physical discomfort, which banished all else. Cold though it had been without, the cold within seemed to freeze blood and marrow. Everything was glazed with ice. Their breath froze on moustaches and beards. Icicles hung on the tails of the horses, on their traces, manes and ears; and the zigzag course of the river involved constant crossing and re-crossing, as in the Bolān. Twenty-eight times, in that terrible five miles. they splashed and scrambled through a torrent against which they could hardly hold their own; and always, within two minutes of emerging, the legs of men and horses were cased in ice.

Not till they neared the fourth milestone did the hills begin to open out and vouchsafe them a gleam of winter sunshine, that warmed their hearts if it could not thaw their frozen bodies. One mile more, and they were free of the Pass; another, and they had reached their camping-ground near Khurd-Kābul village, after the severest day's march they had experienced since leaving Herāt.

Day after day the inhospitable face of the country showed little or no change. Even where the valleys widened, few signs of life appeared to soften the harsh features of rock and boulder and jagged escarpment, and loose stones underfoot made progress painful as it was slow. For more than forty-two miles they rode through an unbroken succession of passes and defiles, sunless for the most part and piercing cold. But after Khurd-Kābul the rest were as nothing; till they entered the gorge of the Jagdalak river, ironically named *Pari-Dari*,[1] and compared by those who have seen it to the Valley of Hell, near Freiburg. Here the cliffs crowded in again

[1] The Fairy Pass.

—menacing, stupendous. In places they were scarce ten feet apart, the torrent zigzagging between them almost at right angles—a defile practically impregnable, wherein a handful of troops might dispute the progress of an army; while an army ambuscaded between its walls of rock could be annihilated to a man.

Happily the Pass was but three miles long; and once through it, the worst of the road lay behind them. It was a relief to cast anchor at last in a walled village on the table-land of Gandamak, where the river flowed between wheat fields, groups of cypresses and forest trees, backed by the outer spurs and snow-peaks of the Saféd Koh.

Next morning, by an easy descent, they dropped into the valley of Nimlah, and beheld, afar off, its renowned garden of plane and cypress trees; its raised planks of masonry for encampment, where the tallest cypresses stood sentinel, as if round an Italian shrine. The garden was already occupied in force. Tents large and small, tethered horses and cattle, proclaimed that they had overtaken the Court on its southward march. Nearer approach revealed the high crimson *kanāts* that enclosed the sacred person of majesty; and Pottinger's Herātis drew rein, gesticulating eagerly.

"Shahzāda Sahib!" they cried. "May the length of his shadow never diminish! Great is our *kismet*. Where the King rests his head, there will be food in plenty—and of the best!"

Nor were they mistaken. Pottinger enjoyed food of the best in Macnaghten's well-appointed tent, where he dined with the Envoy and his staff, and sat talking late into the night.

If he had felt awkward at Kābul in his Afghan dress, he felt still more so, seated among men in white shirt-

fronts at a civilised dinner-table, such as he had not seen for nearly three years. And now for the first time, he met, face to face, the man he had so long known on paper.

Without, as within, the two made a striking contrast, apart from any accident of dress. The squarely-built subaltern, with the resolute mouth, the unadorned directness and sincerity of speech, was of another type altogether from the polished scholarly diplomat, who spoke fluently in his own language and half a dozen others, and whose too-fertile imagination saw men and things as he would have them rather than as they were. In Macnaghten's face, the fine forehead and eyebrows were discounted by the arch of the eye, the insignificant mouth and non-committal chin; as were the man's undoubted intellect, imagination and courage discounted by lack of judgment, resolution and that inner sincerity which saves its possessor from pitfalls of self-deception.

But on that first night of meeting there was much of interest to tell; much to hear; and business was postponed to a more seasonable moment.

Next morning—while it was transacting—George Lawrence wrote to Honoria, Henry's wife, of the interesting new arrival and of all he had to tell. "He seems an active, intelligent fellow, but not very bright," was the verdict of George, the perennially cheerful; though it may be doubted whether his own brightness would have been proof against two years of Herāt and Yar Mahomed Khan. "He dresses entirely as an Afghan; and hasn't a morsel of European clothing, except three shirts, made for him with great difficulty by an old lady at Herāt! Such beauties they are! He is going to join the Governor-General's camp to confer with his Lordship on Persian affairs. Login has given him a letter to Henry; so you may see him when he passes through Ferōzepore."

Thus did John Login bring about a meeting not soon forgotten by either man; since each was quick to perceive in the other the elements that make for greatness.

Pottinger, when it came to business, found Macnaghten perturbed, not a little, by those October letters from Todd. That, in the face of a treaty signed and sealed, he should have to record fresh intrigues with Persia and see no alternative for England but to attack or be attacked! It was not to be endured!

"The signing and sealing of a dozen treaties would not change the Ethiopian's skin," Pottinger remarked dryly.

"Then, upon my soul!" cried the distracted Envoy, "I've a good mind to break off the treaty; send an army to Herāt and add it to the Kābul crown. In no other way shall we ever secure His Majesty on the throne."

This from the man who had written eloquently about "preserving the integrity of Herāt."

Pottinger smiled thoughtfully. "If that had been done earlier, the State might have been saved a large sum of money."

Macnaghten seemed to resent the implication. "It's not too late yet. You will have a favourable opportunity of broaching the matter when you join the Governor-General. He will, I fancy, be anxious to have a memoir of your travels and a clearer statement of expenditure than we have received as yet."

Pottinger rose to depart. "*I* am anxious to give his Lordship every facility for testing the accuracy of my accounts."

So they parted in all friendly politeness; though it was plain to Pottinger that no confidential relation would ever be possible between them. Next day they all moved on to Jalālabad, "Abode of Splendour"; a mud-built town in a valley of sand and stones; its bastions and

walls so ruinous that through the breaches cattle were driven out to graze ; its ten brass guns mounted on useless carriages ; its royal residence, a barn.

Here Pottinger willingly parted company with the uncomfortable formalities of an Oriental court in motion. It was agreed that beyond the Khyber he would no longer need his double escort of Sepoys and Herātis ; and this was ill news for the latter. If they might no longer serve the Sahib, who had taught them to know the meaning of justice, they begged that they might not be dismissed from British service ; might, also, as a mark of great favour, be allowed to keep the horses given them at Herāt. Needless to say their requests were granted. No man who had done Pottinger a service was ever forgotten or overlooked by him ; and this his faithful remnant —many of whom had been stripped and beaten for their devotion—were assured that they need have no fear. Six of them, under Allah Dad Khan, he gained leave to take on with him down country. The others were to be retained as Irregular Horse, and be left, in passing, with Captain Mackeson at Fort Jamrud.

Once beyond Peshawar, with Afghanistan behind him and the unknown Punjab before, his reduced party marched steadily southward, without fear of let or loss ; halting at this or that point, as inclination prompted, in the pleasant, deliberate fashion of a day untroubled by the tyranny of speed.

Lahore, Ferōzepore, Kurnal, Delhi, Agra—fresh revelations, all, to the Bombay subaltern, and welcome additions to his geographical knowledge. At Ferōzepore he spent a few days with Login's friend Henry Lawrence and his wife—ardent wedded lovers, happy in the possession of their first son : at Kurnal, another few days with Tom Pottinger—mightily pleased at his promotion to acting-

adjutant, studying the language in view of further honours: and always there was the abiding interest in his Herāti boys, the memoir of his Hazara journey and the companionship of his faithful friend Hakeem Mahomed Hussain. The good man had refused the offer of a hundred rupees a month from Todd, choosing rather to bestow his services on "the saviour of Herāt" and accompany him, as Mirza, to Calcutta, where Pottinger promised he would gain leave for him to attend all public lectures on medicine or surgery, and study at first-hand the management of British hospitals.

The New Year had begun, and they were nearing Gwalior, when they heard that the Governor-General was marching through the plains of Central India on his winter tour of inspection; and, on reaching Gwalior, they found him there encamped.

High walls of crimson cloth encompassed the elect. Without, were bell-tents of native servants; lines of tethered horses, and bullocks, camels and elephants. Within was a city of tents—sleeping-tents, mess-tents, cooking-tents, office-tents: officers in uniform; servants of all grades, from the humble necessary sweeper, to supercilious *chuprassis* in scarlet and gold. A lesser crimson wall enclosed the sanctum of his Lordship, with his sisters, Fanny and Emily Eden; lively, talented women, enjoying a unique experience, tinctured with the minor discomforts of life in a moving camp, no matter how luxuriously laid out. Inside the crimson *kanāts* three private tents, a dining-tent and magnificent durbar tent were set so as to form a courtyard, with covered passages to protect the ladies from cold and damp.

Pottinger, conducted to Lord Auckland's tent, was received as warmly as if he had been a personal friend. He found his Lordship elated at the news from Khelāt,

where the fortress had been carried by Willshire "quite in the Ghazni manner"; though stout old Mehrāb Khan had fought like a lion, and died, sword in hand. Of Macnaghten and his doings he spoke with more reserve. There had been too much insistence on troops lately to suit the man who had been lured from the path of peace and prudence against his better judgment. Chiefly he desired a full account of Pottinger's own actions; a desire Pottinger was neither willing nor able to fulfil. But, himself excluded, he found much to say of the good work started at Herāt by the officers of the Mission.

The dinner hour found the incongruous pair still deep in talk.

"You will join us to-night, of course," said his Lordship graciously: and the invitation was a command. Pottinger, dismayed, clumsily tried to excuse himself on the score of possessing no suitable clothes.

Lord Auckland declared that native dress would add to the interest of his presence; and Pottinger could say no more.

It was late; and the great man hurried away with never a word to any one about his unexpected guest.

Pottinger, having no toilet to delay him, entered the great dining-tent in good time, cursing his luck.

Half a dozen officers in mess uniform stood round the stove. They glanced up at his entrance; saw a fair-skinned native, unknown to any of them; raised their eyebrows in polite amazement—and went on talking. They supposed he must have come in by accident; and, discovering his mistake, would go quietly out.

He did nothing of the sort. Though uniformed backs were turned on him, he continued to stand there, leaning against a tent-pole, wishing the ground would open and swallow him before Lord Auckland arrived.

The officers began to whisper among themselves; not too quietly, for none imagined he could understand.

"Deuced impertinent fellow," said one. "Wants to catch His Excellency about some favour."

"Lord Auckland brings this sort of thing on himself," said another. "Treats any black devil as if he were one of *Us*. We can't have this fellow in here when the ladies come. Some one ought to turn him out."

That seemed the general opinion. But though others came in, and glanced inquiringly at the man without a wedding garment, the necessary "some one" was not forthcoming.

Unmistakable voices outside made the officers near the stove start guiltily, and exchange glances of dismay.

Lord Auckland entered, with the Honourable Emily Eden, in elaborate flounces and costly Kashmir shawl. Then was dismay exchanged for mute surprise. For the "native" leaning against the tent-pole straightened himself and smiled. Lord Auckland beamed on him as on a friend, came forward briskly, and turning to his sister, presented the intruder with a gracious wave of his hand.

"My dear," said he, "we are greatly honoured this evening. Let me introduce you—to the hero of Herāt!"

Miss Eden swept a curtsy. Pottinger bowed in response; and at once the whole tent was in commotion. The officers of the staff pressed eagerly forward; and, in defiance of etiquette, the whole assembly broke into disjointed cheers.

It was a proud, yet acutely uncomfortable moment for a modest man. Eldred Pottinger had felt far less perturbed in the clutches of Yakub Beg, or in the breaches of Herāt, than on that evening of January when he sat

down to dinner between the Honourable Emily Eden and His Excellency the Governor-General of India.

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The news of victory, that had so elated Lork Auckland, was true indeed.

Justly or unjustly, Khelāt had been stormed and carried. General Willshire had won laurels due to Nott; and Mehrāb Khan—who, five years earlier, had saved a fleeing and defeated Shah Shujah from the wrath of his enemies—had paid for that act of hospitality with his life. After his death it was found that he had been surrounded by traitors who had secretly frustrated his attempts at negotiation. But the harm was done; another seed of hatred to Shah Shujah and his allies sown in the hearts of a people who neither forget or forgive.

Probably few among the British officers knew enough to be troubled with doubts as to the justice of these minor issues. Certainly none gave a thought to the gallant soldier, eating his heart out at Quetta, hoping for the crumb of consolation flung to him by Keane, that, at any moment, he might be ordered to advance on Khelāt. Now that coveted chance of distinction had been given to another; and insult added to injury by an intimation that he was to hold himself and his troops ready to act under Willshire's orders. Here was an arrow tipped with the poison of personal malice; but months of healthy life at Quetta had calmed his excitable temper. He merely wrote that any request for aid would be complied with; but, conceiving himself senior to a *local* Major-General, he could neither serve under that officer nor obey orders issued by him. By this firm, yet temperate protest, he

hoped to vindicate the honour of the Indian Army and bring the whole vexed question to an issue. But since the death of his wife it was as if an evil fate pursued him.

Sir John Keane forwarded the protest to Lord Auckland, who—in due course—notified his high displeasure, and called upon Major-General Nott either to obey Government orders, in respect of local Major-Generals, or resign his command.

It needed but this to break a spirit already subdued by personal sorrow. Nott tendered his submission on paper, merely regretting that matters had not been made clear to him from the first. But, in his heart, he resolved to resign the command. He sent word to his girls; and had begun to pack up his belongings—when a missive arrived from the Auditor-General, bidding him refund the sum of nine thousand rupees, which he had drawn as command allowance.

Stunned for the moment, his wrath flamed up afresh: but, for the sake of his daughters, he could and did endure all.

To them alone he poured forth the bitterness and anger that consumed him. "I told you that in the nineteenth century they would not dare to hang me," he wrote after breaking the news. "But they are not ashamed to rob me. I am sorry for this great loss on your account. . . . You perceive that economy will be necessary. I will live almost upon the wind to pay this *very honourable* and *just* debt! . . . If I can possibly arrange money matters, I will still quit this, and march for Calcutta."

By the time affairs had reached this pass he had left Quetta, and was installed at Kandahar in command of four native regiments, a few troops of cavalry and sixteen guns. November found him settled in for the winter,

writing fully and regularly to one or other of his beloved girls. "Here I am, in a house for the first time during the last thirteen months. It is an upper-roomed one, and belongs to His Majesty. My friend, Sir J. Keane, had sent an order from Kābul directing this house to be appropriated for the commissariat treasury; I suspect, merely to prevent my getting it. . . . But as I command the garrison, I ordered it to be vacated; and I am now writing to you from a snug corner room upstairs. . . .

"For the last eight days I have been three or four hours each day on horseback, galloping in every direction, always at full speed, wrapped up in my large military cloak. I can assure you it is *no joke* for the orderly troopers who follow me in my rambles. . . ."

That simple, strenuous fashion of life thoroughly suited his taste; only the abiding sense of injustice rankled within. But, in this case, he was allowed for once to taste the sweets of reparation. April brought another Government letter, cancelling the ungenerous order, and crediting him with the sum already deducted —four thousand rupees. This he thankfully set aside as a nest-egg for his "children," after spending a small amount on additional comforts in view of the approaching hot weather: glass doors and windows and a Bengal punkah, the first ever seen at Kandahar. Apart from these luxuries, the old man continued to live as hardly and simply as any subaltern in his command. He enjoyed the climate, and admired the people. Afghans in the surrounding villages soon came to know, better still, to welcome the picturesque figure on the bay horse. Virile and vigorous, Nott was the very man to command their admiration; the very man whose presence at head-quarters might have gone far to mitigate the universal hatred of British occupation.

So the winter passed—quietly at Kandahar ; imposingly at Jalālabad, and at Kābul cheerfully enough, in spite of disturbing rumours as to the movements of the Amir, and the possible advance of Russian battalions.

Winter in Afghanistan is a time of enforced quiet even for so restless and quarrelsome a people. But the handful of British officers at Kābul, thrown upon their own resources, were by no means at a loss for amusement. Like Nott, they made many friends among the Afghans. But his intimacy was rather with the people ; theirs with the chiefs, who invited them freely to their town houses and country castles ; and were no less freely entertained in return.

As summer waned, cricket and horse-racing had been exchanged for football, hockey and quoits. High stakes were wagered over fighting cocks and rams, and feats of wrestling, wherein the Afghans—to their frank surprise —found themselves overthrown again and again by their new friends. Yet it took time to convince them that men who hailed from the plains of Hindustan could be other than effeminate folk, unused to the rigours of snow and ice, which they reckoned, next to warfare, the most potent makers of men. Great, then, was their wonder when they beheld these versatile Feringhis rejoicing in the severe frost of December ; praying for snow before Christmas to remind them of home.

And there was greater wonder in store. On a cloudless day of December they took a party of Englishmen to the lake that lies five miles beyond Kābul. The ice was strong enough, now, for running, sliding and other winter sports ; and the Feringhis, they were convinced, could not beat them on this, their own ground. At first it seemed that they were right. Many of the British officers had not set foot on ice for ten or twelve years ; and their attempts at

sliding were so ungainly that the Afghans shouted in good-humoured derision.

"Spake we not the truth?" cried one. "You are no true men of the North, if you cannot run upon ice."

The subalterns joined in the laugh against themselves; but afterwards they took counsel together how their national supremacy might be asserted. In a city so full of skilled artificers, it was not difficult to find one who could make skates from a rough model made by Sinclair, of the 13th. Old iron, smelted and hardened, served for blades; and the rest was simple enough. For the skate of 1839 was a very primitive affair of wood and iron and straps.

So the artificers worked, and the subalterns rejoiced—strictly in private. At length, on the appointed day, they announced a forthcoming *tamasha* on the lake that should prove them true men of the North, and cause the Afghans to open their eyes and their mouths wider than ever before.

It was a proud moment when they set out; prouder still when they strapped on their skates under the eyes of a curious crowd. Then they stood up; staggered, swayed—and, after the first ungainly lunges, dashed forward in gallant style. They backed, wheeled, cut threes and eights with shouts of exultation, echoed by "*Wah—wahs*," "*Inshallahs*" from the Afghans, who declared themselves nonplussed by this magic of "running on ice with knives."

"*Now* we see that you are not as the infidel Hindus," cried he who had derided on that earlier day. "By the Prophet's beard you are men indeed; born and bred like ourselves, in a country where the changing seasons give vigour to body and mind. Great would have been our *kismet*, and your own, had you come among us as friends.

One by one, you are fine fellows enough. But as a nation we hate you from the heart; because we also are men, like yourselves, loving liberty better than life."

It was an honest statement of fact; and it put the whole truth in a nutshell. Individually, many Englishmen in Afghanistan commanded liking, even admiration; and during that first sociable winter, it was impossible for British officers, ignorant of the country, to realise that, even then, they were treading on concealed fire; fire that would suddenly and terribly destroy the surface crust of friendship and break up the ground under their feet.

23

But if the officers at Kābul were ignorant of the country, Sir Alexander Burnes was not. Disappointed of the speedy promotion he looked for, discontented with his present anomalous position, he watched, with half cynical amusement, the amenities between city and Bala Hissar. Though himself no sportsman, his hospitality and lively humour made him a general favourite; for he kept open house, and entertained his guests in lordly style. There was little else for him to do, except reading, for which he had a natural taste: and he had carried a varied assortment of books with him to the ends of the earth. Tacitus, Horace, Guizot, lives of Sidney Smith and Warren Hastings—each in turn served as anodyne to a man hungering for responsible work; diverted his mind from brooding on the unfulfilled promise that Macnaghten's early return would leave him virtual ruler of Afghanistan.

In the intervals of reading, his pen was unceasingly occupied, either with the journal of the period, or dis-

cursive letters to relations and friends. Condemned to the rôle of looker-on, he undoubtedly saw more of the game than Macnaghten; but, his observations and opinions being obviously superfluous, he bestowed them mainly on his friend and fellow-political, Doctor Percival Lord—now at Bamián with his small detachment, which had been better occupied in drilling and parading at Kābul, than in lending military significance to the vagaries of a political "Fidgety Phil." But in Lord's eyes the game of Central Asian politics was a means to one end only—personal distinction; and to sit quiet was to be overlooked. Vain as he was ambitious, he little guessed that his high-sounding despatches were ridiculed by Keane and bemoaned by Lord Auckland, who dreaded the costliness of fresh entanglements beyond the Hindu Kush. But Lord went on his way rejoicing; though he again—like Burnes and Macnaghten, in '38,—was enthusiastically digging his own grave.

Far less astute than Burnes, Lord was fully his equal in ambition, restlessness and lack of judgment. Indeed, it seems more than probable that the irresponsibility of those earliest Afghan politicals, Burnes, Lord and Leech—to say nothing of Macnaghten's tragic example—went far to induce the sweeping denunciations which, for a time, it became the fashion to hurl at a remarkably able, upright and courageous body of men. The first three had been closely associated in the original Kābul Mission, and had remained firm friends. So it happened that when, in the winter of his discontent, Burnes was moved to discursiveness, he bestowed it all upon the man who could be trusted to applaud his personal point of view.

Fragments from these voluminous letters, written between November and March, give a lively picture of men and events, coloured always with the writer's egotism,

shrewdness and humour. Russia, the supreme topic of that winter, naturally stands first. But by January, Burnes' letters were concerned with troubles nearer home.

"How can I say things go wrong? My dear Lord—sheets are writ in praise of the Shah's contingent. Yet—God is my judge—I tremble every time it is employed, that it will compromise its officers. The Shah can never be left without a British army; for his own will never be fit for anything. . . . For myself, imprisoning rupees and reading are now my engagements; and I have begun this year with a resolution of making no more suggestions and of only speaking when spoken to. I do not say this in ill humour—quite the reverse. A screw from Machiavelli supports me. 'A man who, instead of acting for the best, acts as he ought, seeks rather his ruin than his preservation. . . .'

"Lord Auckland took a step, in sending an army into this country, contrary to his own judgment, and he cares not a sixpence what comes of his policy, so he gets out of it. . . . Macnaghten now begins to see his own false position; suggests remedies; and finds himself, for the first time, snubbed by the very Governor-General whose letters have been hitherto a fulsome tissue of praise. The Envoy sees that Russia is coming on; that Herāt is not what it ought to have been—ours. . . . What says Lord Auckland? 'I do not credit Russia's advance on us. . . . I wonder,' adds his Lordship, 'that you should . . . seek for more troops in Afghanistan. It is your duty to rid Afghanistan of troops.' All very fine, but mark the result—calamity, loss of influence, and with it loss of rupees.

"What, my dear Lord, do I mean by all this? *Ex uno disce omnes.* Be silent, pocket your pay, do nothing but what you are ordered, and you will give high satis-

faction. They will sacrifice you and me, or any one, without caring a straw. This does not originate from vice, I believe, but from ignorance. An *exposé* of our policy from the day we were bound hand and foot at Lahore, till Shah Shujah threatened to resign because the cellars of his palace were occupied by munitions of war, when Russia was on the Oxus, would make a book which future diplomatists could never, in blunder, surpass. But how should it be otherwise? The chief priest, ere he started, asked if Khiva were on the Indus. Bah! I blame the Governor-General for little; if he is a timid man, he is a good man. Wade hoodwinked him about Kābul when I was here; another now hoodwinks him. . . . His Lordship has just written to me to give him my say on public matters. Am I a fool? He does not want truth; he wants support; and when I can give it I shall do so loudly; when I cannot, I shall be silent——

"March 4. There is no two days' fixity of purpose here—no plan of a future policy. The bit-by-bit system prevails. Nothing comprehensive is looked to; the details of the day suffice to fill it up. . . . I for one begin to think Wade will be the luckiest of us all to be away from the break-down; for, unless a new leaf is turned over, break down we shall."

So early did the dread Inevitable cast its shadow upon those who were not blinded to reality by their own conceits and desires. In September, Keane, in March, Burnes struck the same ominous note of prophecy; and in April, 1840, Nott replied to Cotton's request for his opinion on the situation in a more temperate, though scarcely a more hopeful strain.

"You must be a better judge than I am of the feelings of the Afghans; but, in the event of any disturbance,

I believe they would almost to a man join the Chief Dōst Mahomed Khan. . . . Indeed, unless you get large reinforcements, you will find some difficulty in holding your ground at Kābul and in the Khyber Pass."

But from Sir William Macnaghten, as yet, no word of trouble foreseen; though, from October to April, he had been beset with discouraging revelations. Yet in December, he marched down to Peshawar with a small *cortège* to meet the longed-for convoy of wives and children.

Before winter was well over dread notes of warning echoed throughout the kingdom—east and west; south and north. In whichever direction he turned his hopeful gaze, something or other was going wrong.

The Durāni chiefs in the region of Kandahar no longer professed a loyalty that would obviously avail them nothing. The Ghilzais round Ghazni and Jalālabad, though crushed for the moment, were far from subdued. Fighters in the grain, jealous of their unbroken independence, and deeply mistrustful of the new order, they awaited only the melting of snow and ice to make their hostility felt. In Mehrāb Khan's country, the Baluchis were already up in arms against the weak tool Macnaghten had enthroned in his stead. The Sikhs were harbouring rebel Ghilzai chiefs, and openly intriguing with the Barakzais. At Herāt—as events shall show—Yar Mahomed was rising each month to more flagrant heights of insolence and daring; and from Bokhara came word of Stoddart's second imprisonment, aggravated by ill-treatment.

This last so wrought upon the kind-hearted Envoy, that he promptly made arrangements for that northward Mission, which failed to free Stoddart and sent Arthur Conolly to his death.

But from Bokhara came also the one gleam that lightened the gloom of Macnaghten's political horizon.

For it happened that Dōst Mahomed, intending to seek asylum in Persia, had been lured by friendly promises of help to turn aside and visit the lesser chief. With him went his sons Akbar and Afzul Khan; the latter having been forgiven for his attack of nerves at sight of the Union Jack flying over Ghazni. Wives, daughters, younger sons, relations and slaves—a motley crowd of two hundred and fifty souls—had been left with the Nawab Jubbar Khan, in the hospitable country of Khulam, east of the Hindu Kush. In December the Dōst had entered Bokhara, where he was received with all courtesy and distinction. His party was fed from the royal table; and it was finally proposed that the deserted two hundred and fifty, with all the family jewels and treasure, should be brought up from Khulam; that the Dōst—being short of money—should dismiss all his followers but a personal escort of two hundred horse. Being Afghan to the core, he feigned agreement; and, by the same *Kasid*, wrote secretly to Jubbar Khan bidding him kill every man, woman and child, rather than let them out of his safe keeping.

As the passing weeks brought no sign of the Afghan zenana and treasure, the Bokhara chief wrathfully realised that he had been foiled of his purpose; flung father and sons into prison, and bade them there remain till the rest of their family came to join them.

Here was news to lift the hearts of Shah Shujah and his Envoy on their return to Kābul—a glorified Kābul, clad in fruit blossoms, wild flowers and young corn. The presence of English ladies and children added a homely, sociable air to the place, making it seem more than ever like a northern Indian station: and very soon came

further good news that raised the barometer of men's spirits all over the country.

The Russian battalions, that Macnaghten vainly yearned to overawe, had succumbed to weapons more irresistible than musket and sword. First snow, then pestilence and famine had so thinned their ranks, that all thought of advance had to be given up: for, like the army of Sennacherib, "they were all dead men."

In spite of the human tragedy involved, harassed Afghan politicals let out a unanimous breath of relief; while the excursive brain of Macnaghten—roaming at large beyond the Hindu Kush—returned with zest to such minor items in his comprehensive programme as the annexation of Herāt, the Punjab and Nepal.

"We have a beautiful game on our hands," he confided to a friend, "if only we have the inclination to play it properly." So he proceeded to call for more troops and more money, that he might carry on his "beautiful game" unhampered by trivial restrictions. Small wonder if the fulsome tissue of praise, woven by the Simla Secretariat, was chequered, as the year wore on, with hints at mismanagement and expressions of uneasiness amounting to alarm.

24

In all directions—Dōst Mahomed apart—there were grounds for uneasiness more serious than Simla yet realised. While Afghanistan's Envoy—like another Johnny-head-in-air—strode across Asia and took counsel with the stars, a fresh crop of dangers flourished unobserved at his feet.

With the first breath of spring the Ghilzais were

" up " round Ghazni, cutting off communications between Kābul and Kandahar. Later on, Khelāt broke out into a fierce spasm of unrest. Quetta was besieged by Kakurs. The son of Mehrāb Khan was afoot with intent to oust the usurper, and all Baluchistan was flocking to his aid.

Fortunate for Macnaghten that he had a general of Nott's quality in that region ; a blessing he was strangely slow to appreciate. But Nott—inured to lack of appreciation—did his duty none the less thoroughly. With the Ghilzais his officers dealt promptly and successfully. Khelāt was a more complicated affair : but here, too, Nott finally gained the day.

To his " children " the tale was told in vigorous fashion, interlarded with wholesale denunciation of the " high authorities at Kābul " and all their works. If that denunciation was at times too caustic and sweeping, it was rarely, if ever, without foundation in fact.

From his camp in the Ghilzai country he wrote on the 4th of July : " The authorities at Kābul are alarmed beyond measure, and I have had occupation sufficient in answering their long and foolish letters. They are like small birds, frightened in a storm, ready to perch upon anything for protection. What will they do when *real* danger comes ? And I think it is at hand, owing to their false measures. . . . Unless the Shah and his advisers turn over a new leaf we shall have plenty to do in this country, and many of us will have our poor throats cut ; and that would be a great loss to the world. . . ! "

At this time, not only Khelāt, but the whole of Upper Sindh was in a ferment : and as usual political errors must be wiped out by the blood of the Sepoy and the obstinately brave Baluch. The complicated state of affairs demanded all Nott's energy of brain and body. Yet he found time, as always, for long letters to his girls.

"We are in a truly delectable situation. Sir W. Macnaghten . . . and Lord Auckland, between them, have endangered the life of every European in Central Asia. . . .

"The young Khan of Khelāt has refused the terms offered to him by our wise Minister and Envoy, and still swears that he will revenge his father's death. At a grand durbar he and all his chiefs swore upon that very convenient book, the Koran, that they would have their own terms, or die to a man. Poor people! . . .

"Meantime, everything goes wrong here. The English name and character, which two years ago stood so high and so fair, has become a byword. Thus it is to employ men selected by intrigue and patronage. . . . Nothing but force will ever make the Afghans submit to the hated Shah Shujah, who is as great a scoundrel as ever lived. The Minister objected to my bringing the 42nd with me from Kandahar, and Sir W. Cotton gave in to his opinion. The consequences are the Khan of Khelāt is insolent: Khelāt is not taken; my hands are tied; and the whole country in rebellion! Oh! they are a precious set, and a precious price John Bull will have to pay for all their fantastic tricks!"

Could Nott have visited Kābul in person and brought his terribly honest brain to bear upon things seen and heard in that centre of loyalty and devotion, it is to be feared that he would not have felt constrained to modify his sweeping strictures in any marked degree. For the double Government showed little sign of working more smoothly now than it had done at first.

Macnaghten might laud the King in letters to Simla as "merciful and kind-hearted"; but his people could have told another tale. He had much power for evil; since he could, and did, put his allies in the awkward

position of having to enforce measures both unpopular and unjust.

Sir John Kaye, in a few trenchant sentences, truthfully states the position : " The King's Minister oppressed the people. The people appealed to the British functionaries. The British functionaries remonstrated with the Minister. The Minister punished the people for appealing. . . . So, bravely, for a time, worked the double Government at Kābul. . . . It was only a question of how long such a system could be propped up by the strong arm and the long purse of the king-makers."

But the farce of universal devotion, and the belief in a country settling down under the new order, were still kept up, for the benefit of the Calcutta Government, by the king-maker-in-chief, whose happiness, in reunion with his wife, was marred by official friction with his own folk : a too common feature of his rule.

For it was now necessary to complete, as soon as might be, those fatal cantonments, aptly and bitterly denounced as " the sheepfolds on the plain." The swampy stretch of ground given over to them was well commanded by neighbouring forts and hills. Its high enclosing wall was replaced by a ditch and a weak fieldwork, bastioned at the corners. The lines themselves were rendered less defensible than ever by crowding in upon them the compound of the British Mission, with quarters and offices innumerable. Worse, they were cut off by river both from the city and the Bala Hissar.

It is said that no objections were raised to the site offered by the Shah ; yet it is admitted that " no worse position could have been chosen." Impossible not to suspect that the Shah—jealous and restive at heart—was cunning enough to be aware of the fact, though none seem to have entertained the idea. Certainly Macnaghten

would have been shocked at the bare suggestion. Sturt, Durand's successor, made one last abortive attempt—harem or no—to keep the troops within the fort; and failing, set his men to work on the plain.

But there was another officer, more shrewd than Sturt, who looked with dismay on the work that was already going forward when Headquarters returned from Jalālabad. To Brigadier Roberts—a strong man and a fine soldier, in command of Shah Shujah's force—both the site and the plan of those fatal barracks appeared "most objectionable." He himself had been head of the Building Department in India; and the longer he looked, the more he strongly disapproved of a cantonment as insanitary as it was indefensible. A protest sent to Captain Douglas, A.A.G., brought the answer that if the Brigadier had objections, he could state them to the Envoy. In spite of an implication that he was interfering, he did state them to the Envoy, who smiled affably; seemed much impressed; and did precisely nothing.

So Sturt's sappers and miners continued to erect that tragical "folly on the plain," with the presumable object of convincing the Afghans that they were neither feared nor suspected by the friends of their King. It was not even deemed necessary to place the commissariat stores within the futile enclosure. They were lodged in a fort near by: and only the ammunition, with a strong guard, remained in the Bala Hissar—for a time.

It has been urged, in extenuation, that the cantonment was originally meant to be no more than a barrack-yard for peaceful occupation: but a plea of that nature serves only to shift the point of blame. For assuredly and in such a country—where every village is a fortified post—no soldier of any sense and foresight would have sanc-

tioned the building of cantonments other than defensible —let the Shah say what he would. All things were sacrificed to a false show of security; and the "folly on the plain" came swiftly into being. The Brigadier registered a vow that his force, at all events, should be more suitably housed. But it was one thing to win Macnaghten's consent to a plan, and quite another to get it carried out. Hence renewed friction between the two men. For Roberts, like Pottinger and Nott, was of the clear-eyed, straight-spoken type that rarely found favour in the Envoy's eyes. Had he ever analysed his feelings about either of these three, Macnaghten might have said, with Cæsar: "He thinks too much: such men are dangerous." As it was, he merely grew irritable, and began to wish the "intrusive" Brigadier elsewhere. Their mutual positions involved them in frequent controversy, almost amounting to clash of authority. Roberts regarded the Envoy as a sanguine visionary, diligently paving the pathway to disaster; and, as signs of disquiet increased all over the country, he felt impelled to protest against the unwisdom of lodging Government treasure in the heart of the city, where Captain Johnson, his paymaster, was living with Burnes. Strange to say, Macnaghten actually agreed; and the treasure was removed to the Bala Hissar.

Johnson soon found it inconvenient to send so far for money; and, backed by Burnes, he appealed for a return to the former arrangement, adding: "The guard would strengthen our position here—two such valuable people!" The harassed Envoy found it simplest to say "Yes"; and the order was given. Roberts again urgently pointed out the risk involved: but Captain Johnson's convenience prevailed.

Result—when the crash came, the treasury was sacked;

and £17,000 of public money fell into the hands of infuriated Afghan chiefs.

But in the summer of 1840 it was heresy to suggest the possibility of a "crash." Hence the growing unpopularity of Roberts, who could not bring himself to make "an easy present, at the cost of a disastrous future." His attitude must have been the more galling to Macnaghten, because hints of a like nature were now beginning to reach him from all quarters. Letters appeared in Agra and Calcutta journals, impugning the Shah's popularity and the success of his government. In due time these found their way to breakfast-tables at Kābul; and worse than all it began to be known at Calcutta how universally the Shah was disliked both by Afghan and British troops. Government comments on this head were too much for Macnaghten; and at last his vexation overflowed in letters to his old friend John Colvin.

He complained bitterly of credence given to tales devised by "idle persons" who resented being detained in a land "not overflowing with beer and cheroots." His grievance grew with the telling of it. He fancied he had lately perceived a want of confidence in his proceedings. He darkly hinted at controversies thrust upon him by Brigadier Roberts, of whom he wrote in no flattering terms; hopeful that supreme Authority might see fit to remove so obvious a thorn in the flesh. But Lord Auckland wrote decisively of his strong desire to uphold the military position of the Brigadier, whom he roundly applauded; adding that "every officer in the country should be led to look to him."

For Macnaghten, this was the last straw. If Government had lost confidence in him, he would resign: and again he wrote to Colvin in the same injured strain. But ruffled vanity was very soon smoothed down. Place

and power were not to be lightly flung aside. Instead, Macnaghten manœuvred the removal of Roberts from Kābul, even as he had displaced Pottinger at Herāt. The Brigadier returned to India, balked and disgusted; but, like Keane, he left a prediction behind him.

Thus were two "alarmists" banished from Macnaghten's sphere of influence; whilst Burnes' intermittent "croakings" were cleverly discounted in a letter to Lord Auckland, urging afresh the prompt annexation of Peshawar and Herāt. Burnes himself would have cared nothing for that back-handed disparagement, had he seen the letter. By this time, grown cynically indifferent, he had sought refuge in Tacitus and in philosophic reflections on the vanity of human wishes.

Not so the most redoubtable "croaker" and "alarmist" of them all—William Nott. In the teeth of supersession, injustice and lack of appreciation, he ceased not from exerting himself to the utmost, whenever opportunity came his way. For him, Macnaghten had secured Government censure. The attempt at stronger measures was reserved for a later day.

While he was handling the Khelāt outbreak in his masterful and masterly fashion, the fruit of Lord's superfluous zeal began to be felt in the regions round about Bamián: and Macnaghten, whose nerves were already on edge, wrote to a friend: "All these little accidents happening at once are enough to disgust one. But *Inshallah!* the Company's *Nasib* [1] will prove superior to them all!"

Yet, within the week, an intercepted letter threw startling light on the spirit underlying these "little accidents." A number of influential chiefs—setting aside private feuds, and backed by Britain's faithful allies, the

[1] Luck.

Sikhs—had combined to ferment a widespread rising in favour of that most unpopular tyrant, Dōst Mahomed Khan.

Macnaghten, distracted beyond measure, and thoroughly alarmed, hurried off to take counsel with His Majesty. But the hour for taking counsel was already past. The hour for action was at hand. Thanks to the alarm created by the activities of "Fidgety Phil," Dōst Mahomed had escaped from Bokhara and had been received with open arms by the Wāli of Khulam.

25

At first the Shah and his Envoy could scarcely credit news so harassing for them both: but events very soon convinced them it was true.

After months of more or less polite confinement, Dōst Mahomed, the resourceful, was abroad again, fully determined, if followers were forthcoming, to regain his throne or fall in the attempt; and it is not too much to say that he owed this happy change of fortune mainly to the irritating activity of Dr. Lord in and around the valley of Bamián. For the zeal of that indefatigable officer had seriously alarmed the neighbouring chiefs of Khulam, Kunduz and Kokan. They, who had been jealous of the Amir in earlier days, now began to feel for him as the victim of aggressive infidels, whose disinterested benevolence seemed merely a cloak for unlimited extension of their rule. Thus were the petty enmities between chief and chief gradually resolved into united enmity against the unbeliever.

So it came to pass that when the tyrant at Bokhara forbade the Dōst and his sons to leave their house, even

for religious worship, protests arose, where otherwise had been mere indifference. First the Shah of Persia, then the Amir of Kokan roundly rebuked the chief. The latter made a movement in force towards Bokhara—and the movement sufficed. Dōst Mahomed and his sons were suffered to attend a mosque near by, without a personal guard ; nor were they slow in turning that permission to account.

A daring plan was evolved, and daringly carried through. Mahomed Akbar with Sultan Jān was to flee in one direction ; Dōst Mahomed, disguised as an Uzbeg, in another ; thus confusing the trail. So, one evening of July, he slipped secretly forth ; met his appointed guide, an Uzbeg horseman, in a by-way of the city ; sprang up behind ; and, all unrecognised, ambled away from the clutches of his over-hospitable host.

Some miles out, a goodly horse awaited him ; and the two sped on, in such desperate haste that the Amir's mount fell lame. " Better a sound *yaboo* than a lame horse," quoth he ; and taking his companion's pony soon left him far behind.

The guide, falling in with men from Bokhara in search of the lost Amir, bethought him cunningly that further money might be gained by betraying his trust.

" You have the prize in your grasp," said he. " There goes Dōst Mahomed on ahead. Catch him up while there is yet time."

But they laughed him to scorn.

" The Amir on such a sorry *yaboo*, and you, his follower, on a blood horse ! A likely tale ! It is *you* that are the Dōst disguised ; and the prize is in our grasp indeed ! "

Vain were remonstrance and denial. The man was caught in his own trap ; and the Amir fled on, till his *yaboo* dropped exhausted by the way. But, his *kismet*

being good, he fell in with a caravan ; and feigning sickness, sought refuge in a camel *kajawar*,[1] which undignified conveyance brought him safely to the territory of a friendly chief. Here, in spite of irate commands from Bokhara, a charger, a dress of honour, and a thousand horsemen were added to him ; and so, on to Khulam, where he heard with satisfaction of Kohistani chiefs goaded into rebellion by unpopular revenue officers ; of Yar Mahomed threatening Kandahar ; of fighting in Khelāt and Sindh.

All things seemed favourable for his reappearance on the scene ; nor was it long before he and his friend the Wāli found themselves at the head of five thousand Uzbeg horsemen, *plus* kettledrums, standards and one priceless gun. That rough-and-ready army fired both chiefs to make one determined bid for victory. They would cut up the Bamián detachment ; emerge from the Hindu Kush ; and raise the whole countryside with the cry of *Jehád*. Kābul would be taken and Dōst Mahomed reinstated, with the Wāli for his Wazir.

It was a stirring programme ; and, on August the 30th, they began upon Lord's little frontier outpost. They were repulsed ; but the Gurkha officers, Codrington and Rattrey, wisely fell back upon Saighan ; and thence again with Hopkins and his Afghan levies on Bamián.

There is nothing in war more demoralising than retreat. Officers and men lost everything ; and the atmosphere of the Hindu Kush, the magic presence of Dōst Mahomed, proved fatal to the purchased loyalty of Shah Shujah's levies, who plundered their officers and went over in numbers to the standard of the Amir.

Cheerful news, this, for an Envoy whose optimism was already strained to breaking-point. Weak as he was in troops, he must needs dispatch Colonel Dennie, with

[1] Camel pannier.

the 35th Native Infantry and two hundred horse, to strengthen the detachment that should never have been sent to Bamián. Yet Kābul itself was in a feverish state: the city, full of Sikh emissaries, openly hostile. People were shutting up shops and sending away their families. In the upper story of the Bala Hissar gateway, Shah Shujah's band had been replaced by a guard of troops; and the beloved monarch dared scarcely venture abroad.

In this crisis Sir Willoughby wrote to Macnaghten: "I really think the time has arrived for you and I to tell Lord Auckland that there *is* no Afghan army; and that, unless the Bengal troops are instantly strengthened, we cannot hold the country."

For once he was not labelled "croaker." Macnaghten lost no time in forwarding the General's verdict, emphasized by lamentations of his own. "Affairs in this quarter have the worst possible appearance. . . . At no period of my life do I remember being so much harassed as during the last month. The Afghans are gunpowder, and the Dōst a lighted match. Of his whereabouts we are wonderfully ignorant. . . . I have great fear that he will throw himself into the Kohistan, where, it is said, the whole country will rise in his favour. . . ."

But so full of surprises is the fortune of war, that even while Macnaghten sat pouring forth his woes on paper, Colonel Dennie was dispersing them with musket and sword.

On the 17th, news had reached him that bodies of cavalry were entering the valley through the great defile, six miles from Bamián. A friendly village had been attacked; and next morning Dennie set out with his little force to punish the enemy's advanced guard.

At once, the scouts fell back before him—and the

astonishing truth stood revealed : no mere advance guard, but an army of six thousand Uzbegs, led by Dōst Mahomed and the Wāli of Khulam. The heights bristled with them. Every post leading to the great defile was occupied in force. Irregular and undisciplined, they yet presented a formidable front. Dennie's detachment, hopelessly outnumbered, depended for salvation on promptness, discipline and dash.

The advance was ordered : a charge of Gurkhas and Sepoys supported by Murray Mackenzie's guns. At each fort in turn the Uzbegs made a determined stand : but the guns were nobly served.

It was the old story, a hundred times proven. Against discipline and dash numbers are of little avail. Before long, that formidable army was broken up and in full flight, with Anderson's Horse at its heels. Tents, kettle-drums, standards and *the* gun—all were abandoned ; Dōst Mahomed and his son only saved by the fleetness of their mounts.

It was a proud day for Dennie, and for Lord, who promptly dispatched a messenger to the Amir, proffering terms of honourable surrender. Dōst Mahomed sent answer stoutly that he would conquer or fall. But fearing that defeat might affect the Wāli's fidelity, he fled by a devious route, resolved to raise a fresh army and fling himself into the Kohistan. So—while his late ally patched up a truce with Dr. Lord—the dauntless Chief rode up hill and down, through defiles and over passes, into that wild hill country north-west of Kābul, where all men awaited him, and his welcome was sure.

News of his escape tempered Macnaghten's delight at Dennie's victory ; and reawakened his fear that the Dōst might stir up Kohistan. There the chiefs grew daily more hostile, and it needed but the inspiring presence of

the Amir to set the whole region in a blaze. Dōst Mahomed seemed a human Will-o'-the-wisp; here one moment, there the next. A veil of secrecy cloaked his every move; and though large sums were offered for news of him, only conflicting rumours came to hand. But the punishment of rebellious chiefs provided motive for the departure of Prince Timour with the "chivalry of Kābul," and a strong force under Sir Robert Sale. Burnes went as Political Assistant, so did his devoted Munshi, Mohun Lāl.

For three weeks Sir Robert Sale scoured that inhospitable region, destroying forts and villages; marching hopefully hither and thither at the beck of rumour; but never a sight of Dōst Mahomed Khan. The prolonged game of hide-and-seek was all in the Afghan's favour. A fresh army had flocked to his standard. With unabated energy he threaded defiles, scaled passes, and hovered on the outskirts of the British force, baffling every attempt at surprise.

Yet were those three weeks as anxious and trying for the Amir as for Sir Robert Sale. To play hide-and-seek with the Feringhis on his own ground was a simple matter; but conviction grew in him that to drive them and their disciplined troops out of the country would prove a task beyond his power.

And while he harassed Sale, deferring the day of surrender, the long suspense told severely on the nerves of Macnaghten and his Shah. Nor was the tension relieved when Kābul was electrified by definite news that the Dōst had appeared at Nijrāo—scarce fifty miles off—with a large following that daily increased in strength. A fever of consternation and excitement prevailed. So inflammable was the state of the city that a concentration of troops, women and children in the Bala Hissar was

predicted as the next move. Guards were doubled and guns mounted on the citadel to overawe the town.

The Envoy, anxious and irritable, began to think seriously of "setting a price on the fellow's head." Shah Shujah made no secret of his eagerness to "hang the dog"; and when Macnaghten mildly deprecated such severe measures, fell to taunting the Englishman on the mistaken leniency of his race.

"I suppose even now," said he, "if I were to catch the dog, you would prevent me from hanging him. Read that. Mine own brother!"

He whipped out a letter from his kummerbund: and Macnaghten read.

It was addressed to the Barakzai chief at Peshawar, and bore the seal of the old blind King, Shah Zemān. It contained a proposal that, with the aid of the Sikhs, he should try and regain the throne, since Shah Shujah had given over his kingdom to the infidels. Forgery or no, it filled Macnaghten with alarm, and banished his merciful mood. Next day, in a long letter to Lord Auckland, he announced his intention of "showing no mercy to the author of all the evil that is distracting the country."

By that time October was drawing to an end; and the day of decision was nearer than any man believed.

It came in a fashion equally unexpected by all. On the 27th Dōst Mahomed drew cautiously nearer to the capital with an army of some four thousand horse and foot. On November 1, Sale's reconnoitring force discovered that their prize was but more than twelve miles off in the Valley of Purwan Durrah. Thither they marched, through difficult country, only to find that Dōst Mahomed's troops had broken cover and were making

their way along the heights as if to retreat through the Purwan Pass.

Another escape was not to be tolerated. There, within sight, almost within reach, was the unseen foe they had been chasing for six weeks. A sky-blue standard indicated his position at the head of some two hundred horse; for the bulk of his army was afoot.

At once the cavalry prepared for action; guns were pushed to the front. But unhappily Dr. Lord—who had joined the force—proposed that the 2nd Cavalry should execute a flank movement; and the two squadrons, under Captain Fraser, turned "threes about" to obey.

Dōst Mahomed, seeing that retreat might be cut off, drew up and prepared to descend the hill.

Rising in his stirrups, and lifting the great turban from his head, he cried aloud: "Now, in the name of God, we will conquer or die. Follow me all! Drive these Feringhis from the country—or I am a lost man."

They followed him steadily down the broken slope; while Lord, in his fashion, exhorted Fraser's troopers.

"See that blue flag?" he shouted. "*There* is Dōst Mahomed. A lakh of rupees for him—living or dead!"

Advance was imperative; and Fraser—beside himself at thought that the honour of capture might be his—promptly gave the countermand: "Front! Draw swords! *Gallop! Charge!*"

On that word, they were greeted by a brisk fire from Dōst Mahomed's infantry; and the officers dashed forward, never dreaming that their men would do otherwise than follow at full speed.

But the troopers—already half turned about—wavered; went forward at a trot; saw themselves cut off from their officers; saw those officers—all in a moment—surrounded, wounded, killed. Then did the Afghans charge gallantly

down the slope in compact order, laying about them with their sabres at those faint-hearted troopers, who fled like scattered sheep; riderless horses careering in all directions.

Their Captains, Fraser and Ponsonby, desperately wounded, were saved by their horses. Two subalterns were killed; and Lord—who had pluckily joined the charge—escaped out of the *mêlée*, only to be shot through the heart by a marksman from one of the forts.

The others, watching from below, saw nothing but a wild jumble of men and horses; nor did they realise, till too late, how ill matters had gone for themselves. Fraser, dizzy and covered with blood, rode up and reported the disaster, with admirable coolness and control. He was then removed to the ambulance corps, stricken far more in heart than in body by the disgrace of his regiment and the loss of his royal prize.

Though the guns had been drawn up, the enemy had passed out of range. Carrying their blue banner to a rocky height, they planted it there, in defiant token of victory.

This was too much for Robert Sale. The hill was impracticable; yet he bade three companies, with two guns, storm it and dislodge that flaunting standard. It was a desperate climb under steady fire; but a sense of lost honour to be retrieved must have inspired all ranks: and the thing was done. The Afghans descended on the farther side; and Sale's force lay down that night fully armed, expecting little or no rest.

But the hours of darkness passed unchallenged. No shot was fired. Those that were not in pain or anxiety slept sound.

And when morning dawned, three thousand men had melted away like dew.

Once again that piece of human quicksilver, the Amir, had slipped out of their grasp and was gone upon his wanderings—none could tell where.

26

Twenty-four hours after the fight, Sir William Macnaghten and George Lawrence, attended by four sowars, were returning from their afternoon ride in the outskirts of the city. Both were cast down; and Macnaghten more than a little irritated. For, at starting, he had received a desperate note from Burnes, written soon after the disaster, urging that all troops be recalled and concentrated at Kābul for the defence of that city.

He had just glanced through the note again and returned it to his pocket. "Over-coloured, as usual, I'll be bound," said he. "Time to talk of recalling the troops when I hear from Sale. Hullo! whom have we here?"

As he spoke, an Afghan had galloped up behind; and now thrust himself unceremoniously between Lawrence and his Chief.

"Is *this* the *Lāt* Sahib?"[1] he panted.

"It is," replied Lawrence, and the man caught eagerly at Sir William's bridle.

"The Amir!" he cried. "The Amir!"

No words could have wrought a more electrical effect.

"What Amir? Who? *Where?*" exclaimed Macnaghten, too agitated for coherence.

Before the man could reply, a second horseman thrust him aside; sprang to the ground; and, capturing the

[1] The Lord Sahib.

Envoy's hand, pressed it first to his head, then to his lips.

Such obvious tokens of submission paralysed Macnaghten. He could not grasp, all in a moment, the full significance of an event so unexpected, so incredible. There must be some mistake—somewhere.

"Are you *indeed*—Dōst Mahomed Khan?" he asked slowly.

The Afghan inclined his head: and for a long moment Macnaghten regarded "the author of all the evil," who was to expect no mercy at his hands.

Haggard and careworn, from the hard life of the past few months, his grey beard uncut and untrimmed, he still looked a fine, powerful figure of a man in his prime. His eyes were full of life and fire. His turban, set a little backward, revealed the remarkable angle of his brow. He had been twenty-four hours in the saddle; yet he showed no sign of fatigue.

Then Macnaghten dismounted also; for they were close to the residency gate.

"You are welcome, Amir Sahib—you are very welcome," said he; and taking the arm of Fraser's coveted prize, passed on through the Mission garden to his own room—the very room in which Dōst Mahomed had held court not two years ago.

Now he prostrated himself, removed his turban, and laid his forehead on Macnaghten's foot. Then rising, he presented his sword, still stained with the blood of British troops.

"It is yours," said he. "I have no further use for it."

But the Envoy, not unmoved by his enemy's gallant bearing, refused the gift.

"Why did you not come in sooner?" he asked. "Knowing you would receive honourable treatment?"

and was told : " I have only come now because no man can control Destiny."

For two hours these sworn enemies sat talking, on the friendliest terms ; and at the end of that time Sir William Macnaghten saw many things with new eyes.

Those two months of plotting and contriving had convinced the Dōst that, do what he might, no undisciplined army could hope to rid the country of British troops ; and he had awaited only one successful contest that would enable him to surrender with untarnished honour. Now his anxieties were over ; his mind at rest. By nature frank and communicative, he talked to all who greeted him—Afghan or English—without embarrassment or reserve ; asked eagerly after his family ; and wrote at once to his sons, bidding them follow his example. This they did ; only excepting Akbar Khan, whose ingrained hatred of the British was not to be set aside even at a father's command.

Food was given to the Amir, and his wardrobe replenished from the Mission treasury. Yet—incurable Afghan as he was—it is said that he cunningly secured discount from the dealers for the whole amount paid ! One of his wives, being still in Kābul, was sent for by Lady Macnaghten, who—in Mohun Lāl's quaint phrasing—" conducted her to the presence of her long-separated lord, the Amir." Tents were pitched for him ; and he was put under the immediate care of George Lawrence, who scarcely closed his eyes for the first two nights ; while his charge slept as he had not slept these many weeks.

For ten days Dōst Mahomed Khan remained at Kābul ; a prisoner, honoured and honourable, winning the friendship and even admiration of all British officers who came to know him ; though these had religiously avoided the company of the King.

Shah Shujah alone refused to see his enemy, declaring that he could not treat "the villain" with common civility; and Dōst Mahomed felt no desire to confront the man who had used the power of infidels to rob him of a throne, which his own arm had gained.

To Macnaghten, he spoke so frankly and freely of his past life, his troubles and adventures, that the kind-hearted Envoy remembered no more that vindictive hint at execution penned in a moment of distraction. The Amir's "family"—a miscellaneous company of five hundred souls—was ordered to march from Ghazni to meet him at Peshawar: and on November the 12th, he left his own country, attended by a personal escort of fifty Afghan horsemen in charge of a young political officer, Captain Peter Nicolson.

And the Envoy—pliable, good-hearted man—found himself urging Lord Auckland, in all sincerity, to treat his prisoner at least as generously as Shah Shujah, if not more so. "For," argued he, "the cases are not parallel. The Shah had no claim on us. We did not deprive him of his kingdom; whereas we ejected the Dōst, in support of our policy, of which he was the victim."

Thus, in a rare moment of mental and moral illumination, did Macnaghten ingenuously denounce the very policy of which he himself had been high priest; and Lord Auckland, no longer blind to the truth, made a tardy attempt at reparation by burdening the Indian Treasury with a pension of two lakhs to one King, while he virtually supported two others upon their thrones. The Amir's destination was Ludhiāna, where, in mere thoughtlessness, insult was added to injury, by lodging him in the same house whence Shah Shujah had been plucked to remove him from the throne.

And now indeed it seemed, to all concerned, that the

Afghan war was over at last: for on the very day Dōst Mahomed surrendered, Nott had retaken Khelāt. The Home Government was beginning to change its tone of approval for one of alarm, amounting to blame: and this last astonishing turn of the wheel gave those in authority yet another chance to prove the sincerity of their Afghan machinations.

"No more striking event could have been conceived," wrote Sir Henry Durand, "for the triumphant return of the Anglo-Indian Army to its own frontier. By furnishing so unhoped-for an occasion, Providence removed all reasonable ground of excuse or hesitation. But man in his short-sighted elation, clung to ill-gotten conquests; and, rejecting the proffered opportunity, was overtaken by a fearful and terrible retribution."

27

Calcutta, Jan. 16, 1841.

"My dear Harriet,

"Your letter of the 28th October reached me on the last day of the year. I had given up all hope of hearing by that mail; and was bemoaning my hard fate and accusing you all of forgetfulness, when suddenly your letter, and two from Uncle Henry, arrived. You can have little idea how grateful the receipt of letters makes a wanderer like myself. I had been particularly cast down before; as several gentlemen in the same house had received bundles of letters. They were all nearly strangers; and I had gone to pass a few days there, while my lodgings were occupied by an officer's widow. Her husband had suddenly died, and my chum, who was getting married, volunteered the use of the house. . . .

"You mention that Lady Macnaghten says the name of Pottinger is a passport all over India. Of that I can assure you there is no doubt. But Smith and Johnson and Thompson, etc., are quite as good; and both pockets full of money a great deal better than all put together. . . . In consequence of Sir William Macnaghten's influence in favour of a friend of his, I am not to return to Herāt: so you can judge how much a name, ours or any other, weighs with Sir W. M. It is true I am indifferent about going back, but neither Macnaghten nor anyone else knows that. I rather think he committed himself when he believed I was going Home; and has therefore obstinately persevered in trying to remove me from a situation which was peculiarly mine. . . ."

So wrote Eldred Pottinger—now a Brevet-Major and a C.B.—after a year of pen-and-ink drudgery in the enervating climate and uncongenial atmosphere of old Calcutta.

Except that he wore the soft shirt and smooth cloth coat of civilised manhood in the 'forties, the year had wrought little change, without or within. Only each week found him more "uncomfortable at sight of a pen"; more impatient to be gone upon the active, stirring business of life, in which alone his true self could find expression. Vainly he had begged for leave, to be spent in further exploring. Lord Auckland's kindness was continuous; unasked, he spoke of future political employment; but, at present, he would not let his unwilling prisoner go.

So, all through the summer, Pottinger had endured the clockwork routine of scratching with a pen.

"I have no shooting or hunting, fishing or fighting," he complained to his favourite sister, Harriet, when the

long hot weather was drawing to an end. "No time to try experiments, or do anything amusing to myself or others. I am therefore very sufficiently unhappy. The only act which has lately disturbed the routine of my life was accepting a challenge to walk three-quarters of a mile in ten minutes at two in the morning! A gentleman took the bet, and we scuttled the distance in eight minutes; but I have been knocked up ever since. I am so enervated with this climate and constant fever."

For whatever friends he may have parted with, this one clave to him always, sapping his good spirits and his natural interest in any work on hand.

Happily, other old friends remained to cheer him. The good Hakeem had become a permanent member of his household; so had the men of his Herāti escort. His boys had been placed as students in the Hindu College; and Allah Dad Khan, after three years of faithful service, had returned to his own country, armed with a written commendation of his "great honesty and fidelity under many temptations and the abuse of co-religionists." Better still, his services were brought to the notice of the Bombay Government, with a view to future employment; and for present reward he had received the lordly sum of 2,000 rupees.

So much for the past. For the present—though the cold weather brought mitigation of illness and discomfort, it brought also the inevitable round of station gaieties, little congenial to his taste; the less so, that he must now submit to an attempt at lionising—mercifully of short duration. For what hostess could make anything of a lion who was neither to be flattered nor cajoled into talking of his own exploits; a lion whose roaring was gentler than that of "any sucking dove." Like George Lawrence, the amiable young ladies of Calcutta found

him "not very bright." Disappointment supervened. There was no denying it: socially, the "hero of Herāt" —as men called him—proved a very uninteresting person, not worth the exertion of flattering.

Little did they dream, good women, that, at heart, he was devoutly thankful when they discovered the fact and gave him up in despair. It was ordeal enough to stand for a full-length portrait, in Afghan dress; though the compliment pleased him not a little. For the rest, his C.B., his promotion, and further employment were all the recognition he asked. The former had been bestowed upon him early in 1840; the latter was yet to come.

During that winter Lord Auckland had received no less than three tributes from Herāt to his gallantry and devotion; one from D'Arcy Todd, the others from his old comrades and antagonists, Yar Mahomed and Shah Kamrān. Todd, having heard on all sides the true story of that critical assault on the 24th of June, rejoiced that the privilege was his of sending to Government the first official report of the incident.

"The presence and skilful advice of Lieut. Pottinger," he concluded, "had defeated all the previous efforts of the Persians; but on the occasion of this assault, he may be fairly said to have saved the city by his own individual gallantry; and in talking on this subject (in the absence of the Minister) this fact is generally allowed by all Afghan officers."

As for the Wazir and Kamrān, their letters were of much the same tenor. "Lieut. Pottinger," wrote the Shah, "performed during the siege most eminent services; never failing to exert himself strenuously on my behalf. Such exertions merited the highest reward that can be bestowed; but I had it not in my power to confer on him

a suitable mark of royal favour. Now, as the interests of both States are one, it is needful that your Lordship bestow on him a suitable reward. I am most particularly anxious on this point."

It is to be hoped that his anxiety was relieved when he learnt that the young Queen of England had graciously gazetted her gallant subaltern—a Brevet-Major and Companion of the Bath.

Pottinger's own anxiety increased as he watched from afar—throughout his year of drudgery and stagnation—the slow on-coming of the inevitable at Herāt; and that through deliberate disregard of his hard-won experience, his urgent advice.

News wandered slowly down to Calcutta, arriving months after the event. But, in the fullness of time, he learnt from occasional letters, from newspapers, and talks with Lord Auckland—how Yar Mahomed cheerfully carried on his double game, in defiance of treaty; how John Login had won so great favour with all the royal household that the ladies called him "brother," and Kamrān was persuaded to ride abroad with him, after eighteen months of confinement in the Citadel; how Abbott and Shakespear had been dispatched on separate missions to Khiva, for the liberation of Russian slaves; how—in spite of Yar Mahomed's secret efforts to thwart them—both missions proved a triumph of courage and character worthy of England's best traditions.

On the whole, Pottinger sympathised with Macnaghten's change of front towards Herāt; but the Home Government had begun to call in question Lord Auckland's entire Afghan policy; and Sir Jasper Nicolls, now Commander-in-Chief, was so frankly disgusted with the whole affair that no further demand for troops was likely to

receive his sanction. Reliefs had been dispatched to Kābul: that must suffice.

So Lord Auckland pursued undiscouraged the old futile policy of conciliation. By way of beginning the year 1840 with a clean slate, it had pleased him to send Yar Mahomed, as New Year gift, an assurance of free pardon for all offences against treaty committed *before* the arrival of his letter at Herāt; coupled with a hope that his Lordship's leniency might have a good effect on the future conduct of his ally, in name, if not in fact.

To Yar Mahomed, this mark of generosity argued weakness rather than strength. It reached Herāt in February; and many months passed before Lord Auckland heard that, in January—when £100,000 of British money had been poured into the bottomless coffers of Herāt—Yar Mahomed had induced Kamrān to assure the Shah of Persia that his very faithful servants merely tolerated the English Envoy from expediency; their true hope rested, as always, in the Asylum of Islam. At the same time the Wazir had written, on his own account, to the Russian Ambassador in Teherān, requesting that a Russian Agent be sent at once to Herāt.

Lord Auckland's feelings, on the revelation of this double act of perfidy, are not on record. But the word of pardon had gone forth; and these mild delinquencies must be overlooked with the rest.

Yar Mahomed, upset by the untoward accident of discovery, professed unbounded gratitude for his Lordship's clemency. By way of practical proof, he declared that if Todd would advance him £20,000 to equip a force, he would expel the Persians from Ghoriān.

The bait took.

Todd, anxious to please Macnaghten, advanced the money; while Yar Mahomed—amazed at this fresh proof

of Feringhi weakness—wrote at once to his friend the Persian General that although the British Agent was urging an attack on Ghoriān, Persia need have no fear for the result. Yet zealous preparations went forward under the eye of Todd, who never understood his man as Pottinger had done. At the last, when all was ready, Yar Mahomed, the invincible, gravely put forward a frivolous, yet ingenious, pretext against the venture; and the whole scheme fell to the ground.

Todd may well have felt foolish; while the Wazir laughed in his heart, perceiving that these English would stretch forbearance to the utmost length, sooner than rupture relations with Herāt.

When news of this flagrant manœuvre found its way to Calcutta, Pottinger—knowing his man—felt bound to offer a grave word of warning. He even declared himself ready to return and do his utmost to mend matters at Herāt—*if* he were permitted to throw overboard the fatal policy of conciliation.

For answer he was politely told that Government saw no reason to change its policy; that he need not trouble about Herāt affairs, as Lord Auckland had already proposed him to Macnaghten for service on the frontier of Turkestan. Yet was the Governor-General moved to write his mind strongly in respect of the great extension given by Major Todd to the system of pecuniary advances to the Wazir. These were, in future, to be discontinued; the Herāt subsidy being fixed at the rate of £2,500 a month.

And what of D'Arcy Tood, who had so ardently craved political distinction?

In November '39 he had written in high elation, to his brother Fred, of his permanent appointment at Herāt, on a salary of 2,000 rupees a month, "You will, dearest

Fred, agree with me that I am a very fortunate fellow." But February found him writing to the same brother in quite another strain.

News of his father's death had saddened him; and he was learning, from painful experience, the truth of Pottinger's quiet remark that hopes did not flourish in the soil of Herāt. Of a more impressionable and less resolute temper than the younger man, he had found the insidious influence of environment harder to resist. Though blest with such inspiriting companionship as Pottinger had never known, his letter is a veritable cry from the depths.

"I have little time to brood over private sorrow. I live in a whirl of constant employment and interruption, and my public duties occupy my thoughts night and day. Such is the effect of 'things that are seen' . . . unless our spiritual eyes are enlightened by the grace of God. I have placed myself in a false position by grasping at the high places of the world. . . . Fred, pray for me! I have preached to others, yet I feel myself a castaway. . . . My life is one long neglect of spiritual things. . . . Having eyes, I see not. Having ears, I hear not. . . . These reflections should send me to my knees. But I cannot pray. . . . All is darkness before me. The world and the world's love absorb past and present; and the future——?

"May God bless you, dearest of brothers. Do not believe one word of what you may see in the newspapers. Our situation is pleasant, and we are quite as safe as people who walk down Oxford Street in a thunderstorm!"

Two months later, he wrote in a more hopeful strain: "All is quiet here. We are on the best possible terms; and I believe Yar Mahomed Khan is really beginning to

understand that honesty is the best policy : but I have had no easy task of it to keep my ground. . . ."

Scarcely had that letter been dispatched, when the Persian and Russian invitations, sent in January, came suddenly to light. So little did Todd understand the nature of his foe in friend's clothing.

From that time onward the task of keeping his ground grew more difficult and more costly. Rupees were poured out like water on a soil that yielded no fruit. Where Pottinger had spent thousands, Todd spent lakhs : and still Yar Mahomed ceased not from demanding advances, and again more advances, on behalf of plausible schemes. And still he ceased not from secret " conversations " with Mahomed Shah.

But, when the Ghoriān affair put an end to British advances, the old hatred of Feringhi interference revived, with fresh vehemence. In August, 1840, Kamrān informed his friend, John Login, that but for his royal protection, not one among them had been left alive : and the fall of Khelāt, the apparent success of Dōst Mahomed, lifted the Wazir to bolder flights of daring. He threatened Kandahar ; and would have used that threat as a prelude to further extortion but for the timely surrender of the Amir. After that, he kept quiet for a space ; so that Todd found leisure to breathe—uneasily enough, and to wonder what would be the next move.

In January, 1841, it came.

The Durānis round Kandahar had again grown restless ; and again Yar Mahomed bethought him of that city. Secretly and suddenly, he sent a deputation to the Persian Government at Meshed, suggesting a combined attack ; demanding money for expenses ; and promising to expel the British from Herāt.

This glaring act of perfidy brought matters to a climax.

Todd rightly felt that to let it pass unrebuked would be fatally lowering to British prestige; while the bogy of conciliation hampered his every act. By way of compromise, he announced that Kamrān's monthly allowance would be withheld till the pleasure of Government was known: and quietly awaited the storm.

Both Afghans were dumbfounded by this sudden display of strength where they had hitherto found a mush of concession. The Wazir excused himself on the plea that British tactics in Afghanistan made him fearful for his country's fate; and artfully parried Todd's blow by offering, on certain conditions, to allow of a British garrison at Herāt.

Again he had cunningly baited his hook. Todd knew very well that this was Macnaghten's dearest wish: but the conditions, backed by a string of arrogant demands, made him give pause: the immediate payment of two lakhs; a larger allowance; advances on loan; payment of his own personal debts and a written assurance of Herāt's future independence—demands no British Envoy could possibly concede on his own authority.

Todd—loth to refuse—agreed to pay the two lakhs, if Yar Mahomed would send his son, as guarantee, to Fort Ghirisk near Kandahar, there to await Government sanction and to escort the garrison up to Herāt. But guarantees were not in the bond: and Yar Mahomed, relying on Todd's eagerness, ventured the bold ultimatum: immediate payment—or withdrawal of the Mission from Herāt.

For once he had pushed his insolence too far. To withdraw the Mission was a grave step; but Todd believed—and Login no less—that submission to payment enforced by threat would be an act outside the pale of consideration.

To the Wazir's amazement and genuine alarm, Todd sent answer that the Mission would leave Herāt at once.

Their departure was prompt and unopposed; though Yar Mahomed, in his anger, came near murdering them all before they left.

In the city violent excitement prevailed. The people took up arms; guns were fired off in all directions; a dense crowd, friendly and unfriendly, thronged the usual gate of departure. But Todd's party—three British officers and three hundred retainers—went quietly out by another gate.

And so an end of that noble, but mistaken Mission to Herāt.

They made their way safely toward Kandahar; and Yar Mahomed sent after them such a letter as he well knew how to write: a letter that should shield him from blame by proving that his friends, the British officers, had causelessly taken offence.

"Thou departedst—and my assembly was broken up. My assembly and my heart were alike broken up by thee!" Such was the burden of his lament, followed by elaborately skilful self-justification; and further outpourings of personal grief. "If I deserve punishment, chastise me: if kindness, let it be displayed. Oh, my brother and friend, *why* this departure and this haste? You might at least have spoken of the matter . . . and then have gone. Now—wherever you may be, God be with you."

Thus Yar Mahomed, arch-liar and traitor: but his impassioned lamentation evoked no answer from D'Arcy Todd. Arrived at Kandahar, he halted his little party; and there awaited, with equanimity, Lord Auckland's judgment on his decision.

If he had any misgiving, it was on the score of patience

and forbearance carried too far. But his news reached Lord Auckland at a singularly inopportune moment. He knew—though Todd could not—that England and Persia were on the eve of settling those differences which alone gave importance to Yar Mahomed's intrigues. He was exasperated by a rupture that would cast ridicule on his whole Afghan policy. For once, he—the calm and cautious—completely lost his temper, as even Governor-Generals will. Without waiting for a word of explanation or defence, he condemned the entire transaction; dismissed Todd from political employment, and remanded him, with disgrace, to his regiment in India.

It apparently mattered nothing to Lord Auckland that the Mission left Herāt unsullied; for at that moment, success was the one thing needful. Had Todd beaten Yar Mahomed with his own weapons, undiscovered—he had been lauded and honoured. Since he could not so demean himself, he reaped censure and disgrace.

As for Todd, he was amazed and stricken to the heart by the injustice of his degradation and the shattering of his dearest ambition.

"This affliction," he wrote to the brother who shared his hope—"was doubtless intended for some wise purpose. I have set up many idols and worshipped them with mad devotion; but they have been cast down before me by an Invisible Hand. I have been taught that God will not brook a rival in the heart of man."

So the wheel had come full circle: and all was as it had been years before; save that a grand total of £200,000 had been paid by India as the price of a friendship never secured. Yar Mahomed Khan had proved, triumphantly, over and over, the old Indian saying: "Great is the power of the white man: greater the power of a lie."

Small wonder if Eldred Pottinger—musing on that first

phase of his Afghan service so untimely ended—were tempted to believe that his own years of effort and endurance had also been of no avail. That he was not justified in this belief is certain: for who is there so perfect in knowledge that he shall dare to say of any honest work—It was in vain.

Let it rather be said—of Pottinger, as of Todd—"A spirit goes out of the man who means execution, which outlives the most untimely ending."

In the unequal duel with Yar Mahomed both Englishmen were foredoomed to fail. But if little had been achieved politically, there remained the fact that much misery and cruelty had been checked; trade and agriculture had been revived; the population trebled, and the character of the British nation raised as it had been raised nowhere else in Afghanistan. Moreover, Pottinger's geographical and political Memoir, had, in Lord Auckland's opinion, materially increased Government knowledge and understanding of its own immediate theatre of action, the trans-Indus Borderland.

Nor can the effect of a man's work on his own soul be justly overlooked: and for Eldred Pottinger those years of action, endurance and responsibility had been the most formative years of his life. He had gone forth little more than a boy—manly, self-reliant, eager for adventure and hazard: he had returned, a man, tried in the furnace; an implement finely tempered and prepared for the larger work, the deeper suffering, that still awaited him in that arena of ultimate Nemesis—Afghanistan.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

The story of Eldred Pottinger's return to Afghanistan, of the Kābul disasters, the imprisonment and final vengeance, is told in another volume, entitled *The Judgment of the Sword.*

M. Diver.

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RAJPUTANA
Tatta
Wanga
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Bhuj
CUTCH
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to illustrate
POTTINGER'S JOURNEY
Scale of Miles
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